



**Government of
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**

Implementing the COVID-19 Recovery & Stimulus Package in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

Ministerial Statements by

Hon. Robert T. L. V. Browne

Minister of Health, Wellness & the Environment

Hon. Saboto S. Caesar

Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Rural Transformation, Industry & Labour

Hon. Camillo M. Gonsalves

Minister of Finance, Economic Planning, Sustainable Development & Information Technology

**Before the House of Assembly
22 June, 2020**

Contents

Ministerial Statements are presented in the same sequence as they were delivered to the House of Assembly on 22 June, 2020.

- 5 -

Ministerial Statement

by the Honourable Camillo M. Gonsalves

*Minister of Finance, Economic Planning, Sustainable Development
and Information Technology*

- 23 -

Ministerial Statement

by the Honourable Saboto S. Caesar

*Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Rural Transformation, Industry
and Labour*

- 35 -

Ministerial Statement

by the Honourable Robert T. L.V. Browne

Minister of Health, Wellness and the Environment




CERTIFICATE
OF AWARD

Presented to
Iris Cordier

PROWING SOUTH AFRICAN ENTREPRENEUR
(WOMEN)



Ministerial Statement

by

The Honourable Camillo M. Gonsalves

*Minister of Finance, Economic Planning, Sustainable
Development and Information Technology*

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members:

Two-and-a-half months ago, on 7th April 2020, this Honourable House approved a Supplementary Budget. That Supplementary Budget was required to fund many aspects of the multifaceted Recovery & Stimulus Package that was conceived by the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The supplementary budget, itself, came a scant two-and-a-half months after the passage of the annual Appropriation Bill. It is rare, if not unprecedented, for a significant supplementary budget to be brought to this Honourable House so soon after passage of the main budget. But the fallout of the pandemic is itself unprecedented, and demanded quick and decisive action from the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to achieve three broad policy objectives, namely:

1. minimising the loss of life and strengthening our public health systems;

2. reducing as best we can the economic impacts on vulnerable Vincentians, displaced workers and most-affected sectors; and
3. keeping the economy afloat through targeted stimulus spending, while maintaining macroeconomic stability and laying the groundwork to resume growth when the pandemic abates.

Today's sitting of Parliament is an appropriate moment to update this Honourable House, and the citizens of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, on the Government's progress in implementing the main pillars of the Recovery & Stimulus Package. However, I am advised that the Honourable Ministers of Health and Agriculture intend to make separate statements on their ministries' specific responses to the pandemic. As such, this Ministerial Statement will emphasise implementation of the Recovery & Stimulus Package beyond the scope of Health and Agriculture. However, I would urge Honourable Members and the listening public to consider all three statements as a collective summary of the Government's progress to date.

During the presentation of the Supplementary Budget two-and-a-half months ago, this Government referred to projections from the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank that predicted a regional contraction of almost seven per cent. Today, the Central Bank is estimating economic contraction in the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union of between 10 and 20 per cent in each country. While we wait for the updated projections of the International Monetary Fund, which are due on Wednesday, the recently-published June 2020 edition of the World Bank's *Global Economic Prospects*¹ predicts a global contraction of 5.2% – the worst such decline in eight decades. Advanced economies are expected to shrink by seven per cent, and “output of emerging market and developing economies (EMDEs) is expected to contract in 2020 for the first time in at least 60 years.”

According to the *Global Economic Prospects* publication, “Current projections suggest that the COVID-19 recession will involve a 6.2 percent decline in global per capita GDP, making it the deepest global recession since 1945-46, and more than twice as deep as the recession associated with the global financial crisis.” Dr. Kenneth Rogoff, Professor of Economics at Harvard University, goes further, stating that “*the short-term collapse in global output now underway already seems likely to rival or exceed that of any recession in the last 150 years.*”²

Unlike previous economic crises, where there are winners and losers – or at least a division between “affected and relatively unaffected” countries, the Coronavirus pandemic has spurred a truly global collapse. Over 90% of countries will experience GDP contractions in 2020/21, the largest such share of countries since 1870.

Since the passage of our Recovery & Stimulus Package, the global and regional projections for economic decline have become more pessimistic. The world, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, is looking at a more pronounced, more severe economic fallout than was anticipated even three months ago.

Here at home, the Vincentian economy, like many others, is experiencing reduced productivity, depressed retail and commercial activity, non-existent tourism and increased unemployment as the immediate result of the COVID pandemic.

Within the formal private sector, data from the National Insurance Services (NIS) indicate that 395 businesses have partially or completely shut down since 1st March, 2020. These 395 businesses represent over 16% of the total active employers registered at the NIS. Over 3,000 claims have been filed with the NIS for employment benefits and Displacement Supplementary Income. In and of itself, this increase in claims suggests that an additional six per cent of the labour force is now unemployed. Considering the impact of the pandemic on the informal sector, we can safely assume that the unemploy-

ment rate has increased by more than ten percentage points over the last three months.

Government's current revenue for May declined by more than 18% relative to May 2019. Value Added Tax collections in May, which can sometimes act as a rough proxy for commercial and retail activity, fell by almost 50% when compared to the same period last year. Other relatively small, but nonetheless significant sources of revenue, like Alien Landholding Licences, Stamp Duties and Yacht Licences, all suffered the expected collapse as movement, migration and investment became more difficult during the pandemic.

During the presentation of the Supplementary Estimates 10 weeks ago, the Government cautioned that there would be "rough waters ahead" in our society and economy. Today, we are all experiencing the early swells and choppiness of COVID's economic fallout.

Nevertheless, we must give thanks that, to date, we are weathering the economic storm as well as can be expected. While our revenue has decreased 20% in May, the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank has reported that other OECS countries have experienced a 50% decline. While our unemployment rate will likely exceed 30% in the short term, the ECCB is predicting 50% unemployment rates in some of our sister nations. As indicated earlier, over 3,000 claims seeking unemployment assistance have been filed at our NIS. In Saint Lucia, the corresponding number is 22,000,³ with 43,000 seeking similar assistance in Barbados.⁴ In Antigua and Barbuda, Prime Minister Gaston Browne has estimated that hotel closures and lockdowns have cost over 20,000 residents their jobs.⁵

In this context, we try to put our hardships into perspective, give thanks to Almighty God and count our blessings one by one. In the case of this pandemic, we are fortunate to not be as dependent on tourism as some other CARICOM countries. We are fortunate that we had the luxury of time to craft an

appropriate response to the pandemic. We are fortunate that friends, allies and development partners responded to our calls for cooperation. We are fortunate that production continued in our agriculture, manufacturing and construction sectors. And we are fortunate that the Honourable Prime Minister charted a courageous and prudent course between complacency and hysteria, based on science, the experiences of other states, and the particular circumstances of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The Honourable Prime Minister sought to build consensus among citizens, target vulnerable persons or dangerous activities, and avoid draconian overreaction in addressing the Vincentian component of this pandemic. While there are still very rough waters ahead, the past three months could have been far rougher, but for the Prime Minister's resolute leadership.

Mr. Speaker,

In crafting the Recovery and Stimulus Package the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines attempted to do all that was possible to promote an inclusive recovery that benefited as many segments of society as possible. This broad-based, inclusive recovery package specifically targeted the a number of defined sectors, including:

1. Persons who may be exposed to Coronavirus infection;
2. Workers displaced or laid off due to closures in the hospitality sector;
3. Workers in the formal sector laid off by business closures or cut-backs;
4. Workers in the informal sector, particularly vendors, cart operators;
5. Taxi, water taxi, and tour bus operators;
6. Minibus operators;
7. Vulnerable Vincentians, especially the elderly and those facing increased financial or nutritional vulnerability;
8. Farmers and fisherfolk;
9. Creative and cultural professionals;
10. Entrepreneurs and small business owners;

11. Those experiencing difficulties in making loan payments to financial institutions; and
12. Those experiencing difficulties in paying utility bills.

I am pleased to report to this Honourable House that, over the past two-and-a-half months, each and every aspect of the Government's Recovery programme has commenced and is being implemented. With the exception of the health and agricultural sectors, which are the subject of separate Ministerial statements, the following targeted recovery measures have been implemented:

First, as of 12th June, 2020, the Government has paid Displacement Supplementary Income to **1,496** Vincentians. These 1,496 Vincentians were affected by the closures in the hospitality sector. To date, the monthly \$300 payment to these 1,496 Vincentians has cost the Government \$1.02 million.

Second, as of 12th June, 2020, an additional **1,100** Vincentians have received a similar \$300 per month via the Unemployment Benefit offered by the National Insurance Services. This programme has paid just over \$600,000 to date.

In total, therefore, 2,596 Vincentians are receiving income support through either the Displacement Supplementary Income or the Unemployment Benefit. These 2,596 Vincentians represent 82% of the 3,164 claims that have been filed to date. Many of the unpaid claims are awaiting additional supporting documentation, while some have been rejected on various grounds. The data indicate that 60% of the beneficiaries of these programmes are women, and that 66% are under the age of 44. On average, these programmes replaced approximately 30% of the beneficiaries' pre-pandemic wages.

Further, as announced by the Honourable Prime Minister in his 25th March Address to the Nation,⁶ the NIS has provided a pre-payment of two months pension benefits for all categories of pensioners (contributory and non-contributory) so

as to facilitate upfront costs of pensioners at this time. This important initiative benefited a total **8,189** pensioners.

Third, workers in the informal sector, particularly vendors in towns and those who traditionally dependent on trade adjacent to schools, are eligible for Interim Assistance Benefits of \$300 per month for three months. A special window was created to make a one-off payment of \$300 to handcart operators. In total, **1,644** informal sector workers – inclusive of 105 handcart operators – have received Interim Assistance Benefits. To date, these benefits have cost approximately \$460,000.

Additionally, a further **60** vendors who traditionally plied their trade along the sea wall were given a compensation package of \$4,500 each to remove their structures and vacate the sea wall area as a prelude to the construction of the modern port and cargo terminal. The compensation, totalling \$275,000, makes provision for three months income support of \$715 per month, in addition to amounts for the value of their structure, removal allowance and timely removal bonus. This compensation, previously agreed by the Cabinet, was timed to maximise its benefit to those vendors affected by the pandemic-related slowdown in activity.

Fourth, vulnerable Vincentians – particularly the elderly the disabled, or those experiencing increased financial vulnerability as a result of the pandemic – received another type of Interim Assistance Benefit. This benefit is a monthly payment of \$200 for the remainder of the year. **Six hundred** Vincentians are currently receiving this benefit. To date, approximately \$260,000 has been spent on this programme.

Fifth, a total of **451** minibus operators have registered to receive two months of income support of \$500 or \$600 for 18-seater and 25-seat or larger buses, respectively. The Government paid approximately \$180,000 to 351 operators. A further payment to the larger 451-operator cohort is expected shortly.

Additionally, through negotiations with the minibus operators, the Government agreed to accelerate the process by which changes in the price of fuel is passed on to the consumer. Taking advantage of falling oil prices, the Government dispensed with the rolling three-month average model and reduced gasoline and diesel prices twice in quick succession. While these fuel reductions benefit all automobile-owning Vincentians, they are of particular benefit to minibus operators who fill their tank multiple times per week. Indeed, some owners are saving between \$500 and \$800 per month on fuel as compared to the pre-COVID prices.

Sixth, one-off income support payments to operators of taxis, water taxis and tour busses will reach an additional **391** registrants. This includes 315 taxis, 44 water taxis and 32 tour buses. A total of 84 of these operators – or 23% – operate in the Grenadines. Taxis, water taxis and tour buses (25-seater and above), registered with the SVG Tourism Authority, receive a one-off payment of \$500, \$300 and \$2,000 respectively. To date, 380 operators have received approximately \$230,000 via this programme.

Seventh, **411** cultural and creative professionals who were adversely affected by the cancellations of Carnival, Easterval, the Bequia Regatta and the prohibitions on amplified music will receive various honoraria through the Ministry of Culture and the Carnival Development Corporation. These professions, who include calypsonians, mas men and women, steelpan tuners and arrangers, and cultural ambassadors, will receive a total of approximately \$250,000.

Eighth, entrepreneurs and small business owners are receiving grant support through the PRYME and PRYME+ programmes. The progress of this programme will be discussed more fully later. To date, **254** entrepreneurs have been approved for grants totalling \$1.75 million.

Ninth, the six-month moratorium programme announced by the Honourable Prime Minister⁷ for the payment of principal

and interest on various consumer and business loans is ongoing. Among local banks and financial institutions, 1,637 borrowers are utilising the moratorium on loans totalling \$141 million. Among the non-indigenous institutions, namely CIBC, RBTT and Republic Banks, approximately 800 borrowers have triggered the moratorium on \$162 million in loans. As such, **2,437** borrowers are availing themselves of the moratorium, on loans totalling \$303 million. The \$303 million in loans under moratorium at the moment represent 18% of the institutions' collective private sector loan portfolio.

Tenth, the further moratorium on water and electricity bills is also providing relief to Vincentians during this difficult period. According to data from the Central Water and Sewerage Authority (CWSA), 1,520 customers over the last three months would have been disconnected were it not for the moratorium. An additional 380 persons took advantage of the free reconnection announced by the Prime Minister.⁸ These **1,900** customers represent approximately five per cent of the CWSA's active customer base.

While the Saint Vincent Electricity Services (VINLEC) did not provide a number of customers benefitting from the moratorium, it did indicate that, between March 20 and May 20, there was a 52% increase in accounts receivable for 60 days for domestic customers and a 7% increase for commercial customers. This upsurge in past-due bills represents an increase of \$580,000 over pre-moratorium receivables.

Eleventh, with all deference to the statement to be made by the Honourable Minister of Agriculture, it is important to mention in passing the hugely successful and popular "Love Box" initiative, which utilizes church and NGO networks to distribute boxes of local agricultural produce to vulnerable families across Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. To date, the Love Box initiative has distributed 5,000 boxes to over **3,500** families nationwide. A total of **370** farmers are selling their produce to Love Box aggregators, and approximately \$300,000 has been spent on the initiative to date.

Further, the Zero Hunger Trust Fund is providing input support of \$500 to an additional **200** farmers. This \$100,000 initiative will supplement other income and input supports that will be announced by the Honourable Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Speaker,

It is impossible for the government to accurately determine how many individual Vincentians have benefitted from the various programmes in the Recovery and Stimulus Package. For example, a single individual may receive an Interim Assistance Benefit, a Love Box and a moratorium on their utility bills. However, adding up the various points of contact between the Recovery and Stimulus Package and the Vincentian public demonstrates the extent to which the Government has been inclusive and comprehensive in its outreach. In total, over **14,814** payments and donations have been made to Vincentians impacted by the COVID-related slowdown. That number balloons to **23,003** if one also considers the 8,189 pensioners that received a pre-payment of two months pension benefits at the outset of the pandemic.

By any measure, the Recovery & Stimulus Package has touched thousands of Vincentians. Even without including the additional hiring of health care and home help for the elderly workers; even beyond those currently importing duty-free barrels; even of the eve of the distribution of the first wave of 3,000 tablets to primary and secondary school students; even as local airlines and businesses that rent state-owned premises get targeted relief; even before all farmers and fisherfolk receive their multifaceted supports; to say nothing of the hundreds of Vincentians who were welcomed home when many were calling for them to be locked out; the response to date has been compassionate, comprehensive and creative. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is not a rich country. But within the confines of our resources and our limited fiscal and policy space, we continue to work towards an inclusive response to and recovery from this economic challenge.

We are proud that, a mere two-and-a-half months after the passage of the Supplementary Budget, we have spent roughly \$6 million on over 20,000 individual acts of support and solidarity with the Vincentian people.

Mr. Speaker,

The vital “Stimulus” component of the Recovery & Stimulus Package is also hitting its stride. As Honourable Members no doubt recall, the Supplementary Budget also emphasized targeted spending on local construction projects to generate short-term employment and critical economic activity during the general slowdown. Such stimulus spending is a prudent and time-honoured mechanism to ameliorate economic contractions around the world. It has proven its effectiveness in the Vincentian context on multiple occasions, most recently in the wake of the 9-11 terrorist attacks and the global economic and financial crisis.

The Supplementary Budget appropriated almost \$30 million to accelerate the PAVE programme of village footpaths; enhance government buildings, clinics and learning resource centres; purchase additional aggregate; rehabilitate bridges and retaining walls; initiate community works projects; and conduct general road repair nationwide. These measures seek, wherever possible, to engage local contractors and tradespersons to maximise the economic impact of the stimulus on affected communities.

The Honourable Minister of Transportation and Works has worked assiduously to implement and coordinate the impact of these stimulus measures. In summary form, I am honoured to report the following:

First, that the Pedestrian Access for Village Enhancement (PAVE) programme is accelerating. Eighty of the first 121 PAVE projects have been completed, and footpaths in Buddy Gutter, Glen, Brighton and Rose Bank are currently underway. Additional PAVE footpaths are imminent, as they await

the execution of contracts and the clarification of various surveying issues.

Second, that a number of community centres and Learning Resource Centres (LRCs) are currently receiving facelifts or will be spruced up during the coming week-and-a-half. These include the Sharpes Community Centre, the Doris McKie Learning Resource Centre, and LRCs at Questelles, North Union, Sandy Bay, Evesham and Golden Grove.

Third, the road repair programme, which has been stymied by the limited availability of aggregate, is now underway in earnest. While the necessary aggregate to construct asphalt roads remains scarce, the Government has imported sufficient aggregate to repair a number of concrete roads. As such, roads in Diamond, Riversdale and Revierre have commenced. Further, weather permitting, the road repair programme will expand this week to include Owia Clinic Road, Macrackin, Diamonds Village, Manawan, Dumbarton, Mary Hole, Sharpes, Sion Hill Bay, Fountain-Villa link road, Old Flour Mill Road, Lower Cotton Ground, Dorsetshire Hill, Greathouse, Pepper Village, Corner Bay, Ridge Road in Troumaca, Quarry Road in Layou, Mt. Pleasant, Bequia, and Bajan Corner and Ashton Well main road in Union Island.

Fourth, as promised during the debate on the Supplementary Estimates, the Government has met to prioritise an additional \$10 million in repairs, refurbishments and small construction projects that were approved in the original February appropriation. These small projects, when implemented in a collective and coordinated manner, will also help to mitigate the local economic impact of the COVID-related recession.

Fifth, a number of critical works projects for which money was appropriated in the original budget are on-going. These include coastal defence work at Georgetown and San Souci; river training and protection at Buccament; the Long Line and Bell Isle roads; construction of new vendor stalls as part of the Kingstown clean-up; the Athletic Track and Football facility at

Diamond; and the imminent commencement of the construction of 47 homes to facilitate the relocation of residents of Rose Place as a precursor to works on the modern cargo port.

Important private sector projects also continue to generate employment and activity even in the midst of the slowdown. Allow me to single out, in passing, the relocation of the General Employees Co-Operative Credit Union Limited, and the on-going construction of The View, the Royal Mill, and Mayah's Luxury Suites hotels. I am also pleased to report that the Rainforest Seafood facility, which suspended works at the onset of the pandemic, has recently resumed construction.

We are grateful to these and other private sector entities for persevering with their investments during this difficult period, and for helping to keep the national economy afloat. The private sector continues to play an indispensable and often patriotic role in minimizing the economic impact of the COVID pandemic in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Mr. Speaker,

Nonetheless, as the medium-term economic forecasts grow more dire, and as the projected recovery time grows more lengthy, the Government has been forced to reassess the scale and scope of the challenge and our response. As originally conceived, the Recovery and Stimulus Package was premised on an assumption that we would begin to see some level of economic rebound around the middle of the year, or early in the third quarter. The stubborn persistence of the Coronavirus through the summer months, the prolonged lockdowns in many countries, and the cancellation of major local and regional events have all lengthened the forecasted recovery time. While some aspects of life in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines appear to be returning to normal, many others remain severely affected.

Some airlines are returning to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in the coming weeks. Air Canada and American

Airlines resume weekly direct flights to the Argyle International Airport in early-mid July. However, Caribbean Airlines has yet to finalise its schedule and LIAT remains grounded. Undoubtedly, even with welcome limited improvements to airlift, the hospitality sector will continue to suffer. Similarly, a number of the 395 recently-shuttered businesses may be unable to re-open and rehire as quickly as we originally anticipated.

Accordingly, the Government will find it necessary to extend certain aspects of the Recovery and Stimulus Package to support our process of economic recovery. Specifically, the Government shall extend the Displacement Supplementary Income to hospitality workers and the Unemployment benefit to other unemployed workers for an additional three months.

Further, the Government intends to consult with employers and the labour movement regarding a further extension to the time beyond which a terminated employee is entitled to severance. While we recognise the tremendous challenges that laid-off employees are currently facing, and the legal obligation to pay severance, the fact is that the majority of the 395 closed businesses would be unable to make severance payments to their entire workforce at this time. We hope to reach an amicable and equitable solution to this issue in the coming weeks.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the focus on COVID-19 has not distracted us from the calamitous effects of a lengthy and unprecedented drought in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines from which we are only now beginning to recover. At the time that we took the Recovery & Stimulus Package to Parliament in early April, the drought was on-going, but its duration and impact on the agricultural sector was unknown. While the Recovery & Stimulus Package included a raft of COVID-related production supports to farmers and fisherfolk – from seeds to fertilizer to fishing vessels – many of these production supports did not fully take into account the short-term effects of the severe drought and its immediate impacts on farmers' incomes. The urgent and unforeseen nature of the

drought, its severe impact on farmers, and the heightened significance of the agricultural sector amidst COVID's effect on other economic pillars, have necessitated consideration of additional supports to this productive cornerstone of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. As such, the Ministry of Agriculture is finalising criteria and procedures through which approximately 6,000 farmers will receive additional income support.

The situation remains fluid. While our public health capacity and infrastructure have improved, and while increasing numbers of Vincentians are reconciling themselves to coexisting with COVID in the medium-term, there are a number of variables that can further alter our plans and projections. Locally, we still have 187 Vincentians in quarantine and two in isolation. Direct flights resume in July from countries still struggling with community spread in various locales. Travel and commerce remain restricted in crucial ways, and subject to further outbreaks and global economic convulsions.

We also cannot ignore the limitations in our fiscal and policy space, and our inability to indefinitely fund extended social safety responses and countercyclical stimulus spending. However, even amidst these uncertainties about the scope, scale and duration of the pandemic, this Government commits to a continuation of its inclusive, people-centred and creative approach to combatting the pandemic. Together, and with God's continued blessings, we can and shall beat COVID-19.

¹ World Bank, *Global Economic Prospects, June 2020*, Washington, DC (<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33748/9781464815539.pdf>)

² Kenneth Rogoff, "Mapping the COVID-19 Recession," *Project Syndicate*, 7 April, 2020 (<https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/mapping-covid19-global-recession-worst-in-150-years-by-kenneth-rogooff-2020-04?barrier=accesspaylog>)

National Insurance Corporation, "NIC Paid out Over \$8.5 Million in income support," 12 June 2020, (http://stlucianic.org/news/35/96/NIC-Paid-out-Over-8-5-Million-in-income-support/d,nic_news/)

Gercine Carter, "Jobless claims 'a strain' on NIS," *Nation News*, 3 June 2020 (<https://www.nationnews.com/nationnews/news/245906/jobless-claims-strain-nis>)

"PM says 20 thousand jobless from COVID-19," *Antigua News Room*, 15 April, 2020 (<https://antiguanewsroom.com/pm-says-20-thousand-jobless-from-covid-19/>)

⁶ Dr. The Hon. Ralph Gonsalves, "Rising Stronger From The Ashes Of Covid-19," 25 March, 2020 (http://pmoffice.gov.vc/pmoffice/images/PDF/speech/Prime_Minister_Gonsalves_Address_to_the_Nation_on_25.3.20_Rising_Stronger_from_the_Ashes_of_Covid-19.pdf)

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*



Ministerial Statement

by

The Honourable Saboto S. Caesar

*Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries,
Rural Transformation, Industry and Labour*

Mr. Speaker:

I rise to make this statement to detail several significant developments within the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Rural Transformation, Industry and Labour over the past two months. I am duty bound, within the context that our world is fighting one of its most monumental challenges to human civilization in recorded history, to update our Parliament and our nation on our successes and challenges.

Mr. Speaker, in the interest of clarity, I have categorized several thematic areas for this statement, namely:

1. Food security initiatives in response to the impact of COVID 19;
2. The status of the implementation of the Agriculture stimulus package;
3. The 2020 drought impact, assessment and mitigation responses;

4. Progress, challenges and prospects in establishing modern medicinal industry and the impact of COVID 19 on the process; and
5. The Canadian Farm Workers Initiative and resultant modifications due to COVID 19.

I will begin Mr. Speaker with, ***Food security initiatives in response to the impact of COVID 19.***

On June 16th, 2013 St. Vincent and the Grenadines was recognised by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) for our fight in reducing hunger and undernourishment. In fact, St. Vincent and the Grenadines received two awards:

1. The achievement of Millennium Development Goal (1), which was to halve the proportion of hunger and undernourishment between 1990-92 and 2010-2012; and
2. The more stringent World Food Summit goal set in 1996.

This was a significant reflection of an overall reduction of indigence nationally. The government has since embarked on a further quest to Zero Hunger, as articulated in our pledge to achieve Sustainable Development Goal number two (2) – which is to “Zero Hunger”. The establishment of the Zero Hunger Trust Fund has created an innovative model to address the issue of the reduction of hunger. I thank today the Zero Hunger Trust Fund for the contribution of 200 vouchers to farmers valued at \$500 each, and \$15,000 to assist with direct support of food supplies to several vulnerable families.

This Government and this Parliament through the establishment of a Parliamentary Front Against Hunger – the first English Speaking country to do so in the Caribbean and Latin American region, has made a commitment to fight hunger and undernourishment. Today, COVID 19 in all of its dimensions, has made large percentages of populations globally generally more vulnerable, and specifically, has made food accessibility and affordability issues of first im-

portance in addressing the impact of COVID 19. Simply, all around the world, as a result of the COVID 19 triggered economic downturn many families have become vulnerable. A national food supply chain has been established to assist vulnerable families with food supply packages. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines four (4) buying depots have become operational in:

1. Langley Park;
2. Lauders;
3. La Croix; and
4. Rose Bank.

A fifth buying will be functional by the end of this week at Rillan Hill. Thus far, 5000 boxes of 100% locally produced food, bought from over 370 farmers have been distributed through Churches, Community Based and Non-Governmental Organizations, and the Ministries of National Mobilization, Education, Health and Agriculture. 3,500 families have benefited nationwide.

On the economic side, the farmers are receiving good prices; farm workers are employed; timely payments are made; truckers are transporting; persons have been employed to facilitate grading and packaging; boxes are being sourced locally. I take this opportunity to thank the non-governmental organisations for volunteering. The Churches continue to play a critical role. This programme will continue to benefit our people in various forms in years to come.

The region and the world is watching! They are seeing a carefully crafted, planned, structured and conceived initiative that will assist the vulnerable.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to share a letter received from Eve Crowley, Deputy Regional Representative at the Food and Agriculture's regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean. These were here words:

“Dear Minister Caesar,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the FAO/WHO International Workshop on Fruit and Vegetables. Your Love Box Initiative has not gone unnoticed. At a time when countries are challenged to find ways to ensure that vulnerable households have access to fresh and healthy foods, when family farmers and local economies are under threat, and when supply chains are disrupted or uncertain as a result of COVID 19, innovative initiatives, such as the Love Box initiative, help to support food security for all, from farmers to consumers.

While this promises to provide a win-win solution at this time of crisis, we also know that facilitating poor consumer’s direct access to farm fresh fruits and vegetables can also be an important long term strategy to improve nutrition and reduce the risks of obesity and overweight.

We hope that you will be able to present this initiative internationally at the aforementioned workshop, and share insights on how public policies can best enhance fruit and vegetable consumption and improve fruit and vegetable value chains.

We have no doubt that the Love Box will inspire other policy makers internationally, including other SIDS countries, as we move towards the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables 2021.

We look forward to learning more from you in the near future.

Kind regards,

Eve Crowley”

My friends in Costa Rica, Chile and Argentina are in love with what they call in Spanish - “Caja de amor” – literally meaning ‘Box of Love.’

The Government wishes to assure all citizens, that the Ministry of Agriculture holds fast to the principles espoused in an appreciation of its mission statement that food security, food safety and food sovereignty are fundamental precepts for life and living in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

The Farmers' Support Company (FSC) remains committed to serving the farmers and fishers of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. As a result the FSC has made the following available at 100% financing:

- Purchasing of inputs at 50% discount;
- Tractor services at 50% discount;
- Purchasing of feeds at 50% discount;
- Purchasing of fishing gears at 50% discount; and
- A 7 years repayment period for the purchasing of boats valued at \$70,000.00 at an interest rate of 0% from the FSC.

At this time of global disruptions in the international food supply chains every single nation on earth is impacted. Our island's food import supply chain does not exist in isolation, neither is our food export supply chain independent of global interconnectivities and linkages.

At this moment of general global uncertainties in food distribution, St. Vincent and the Grenadines is called to redouble its efforts, as a food producing nation, targeting local consumption, intra-regional and regional export and the servicing of extra-regional markets.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to recognize the efforts of two entrepreneurs, for their modeling of a system of boxes of food delivered for purchase. The Ministry of Agriculture will provide support with data and other logistics. Further, I thank the secretariats of the OECS and CARICOM for allowing their excellent technicians to assist us. The FAO and IICA have always been there for us.

Thanks to colleague Ministers who have worked to ensure

that even though borders were closed – goods from St. Vincent and the Grenadines were not locked out.

Both the Minister of Agriculture and Food Security of Barbados – Hon. Indar Weir and Hon. Clarence Ramharat - Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries of Trinidad and Tobago went beyond the call of duty to assist our people.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the ***Status of the implementation of the Agriculture stimulus package with forecasting to March 2021.***

The creation of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines' COVID 19 Food Security and Livelihood Impact Mitigation Initiative, is a critical element of the Government's multifaceted response to the unfolding Corona virus pandemic.

The overarching goal is to continue to alleviate the direct negative economic impact to stakeholders through the provision of support to farmers and farmworkers, agro-processors and fishers to:

1. Maintain national food security by ensuring the continuity of food production;
2. Sustain smallholder farmers' and fishers' livelihoods; and
3. Increase the productive capacity to take advantage of potential strategic investments as the opportunities emerge, to safeguard existing markets, to compete effectively in future global markets, and to reduce the food import bill.

The program comprises of the following:

1. Producers' Care Program – This refers to the 'Love Box' initiative and the soon to be established 'Care Packages' plan which will focus on backyard gardening;
2. Small Fisher Fleet Expansion – the advertisement for tender I am advised has been completed;
3. Fishing gear – the distribution will begin in the up-coming week.

4. Fertiliser – Inputs And Other Implements – a shipment of 4,000 sacks is expected by the end of the month to June.
5. Seeds And Seedlings 200,000 vegetable seedlings already distributed; 40,000 pineapple plants, 1,000 citrus and 5,000 Ackee now ready for farmers;
6. Animal Distribution (Livestock Revolving Program;
7. Tractor Service (Land Preparation Equipment Services) – has started;
8. Sea moss industry support is a priority; and
9. Poultry assistance will be available starting from next week

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the ***2020 drought impact, assessment and mitigation response.***

St. Vincent and the Grenadines was affected this year by one of the worst droughts experienced in the last 50 years. A national drought assessment impact will be compiled in a week.

The reality is that the Government has put in place a stimulus package to assist farmers grappling with the vagaries of the Covid 19 pandemic. Amid addressing this health crisis, the country was affected by the worst drought in decades. All these are being addressed against the backdrop that June 1 was the official start of the Hurricane Season.

In a *Preliminary Impact report from the Ministry of Agriculture*, there is a general reduction in cultivation in coastal districts owing mainly to the loss of crops already cultivated. Some farmers have witnessed the death of farm animals as a result of the extremely harsh drought conditions.

Strategic responses:

1. Livestock were provided water and grass transported by the government at zero cost to the farmer.
2. Farmers have been assisted with water tanks and support to enhance on farm irrigation.

There are three matter concerning livestock farmers which we must address:

1. Stray dogs are destroying many animals;
2. Many farmers with animals are failing to restrain these animals thus causing destruction to crop farmers; and
3. The Ministry is expecting to begin an animal farm tagging project in three (3) weeks.
4. 6,000 farmers will receive drought recovery support.

Mr. Speaker, I now move to ***Progress, challenges and prospects in establishing modern medicinal industry and the impact of COVID 19 on the process.***

There is a clear policy to diversify the agriculture sector in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The COVID 19 pandemic has brought into sharper focus the need and demand for plant based medicine.

Increasing production of crops which are currently imported as a part of an import substitution drive and the establishment of extraction systems for a plant base medicinal industry are two means of deepening the diversification process, in addition to expanding the acreages of commodities already forming part of the extremely diverse production platform. Cabinet has granted approval upon application to 38 traditional cannabis cultivators; 10 groups of traditional cannabis cultivators comprising over 150 persons in the aggregate; 13 farmers who were not traditional cultivators; 5 local investor companies and 17 foreign based companies. Many of the investors have been unable to travel for the past months. This quite naturally will slow down the cannabis industry's development.

The Medicinal Cannabis Authority is currently in the final stages of completing its Lab (95% completed) to be able to do all testing required in country. The focus is on medicinal. This begins and end with science. Once the standard operating procedures are in place applications will be made for inter-

national accreditation. This will certainly improve the marketability of medicinal cannabis produced in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

For many years, we have heard canvassed information about the medicinal properties of many plants in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. A book was written and published by Jo-Ann Ince Jack. The Ministry of Agriculture has contacted Professor Lennard O'Garro to do a costing on an entire plant based medicinal extract value chain. This is expected to be completed in approximately three months. The plants which will be the main focus, but the list is not exhaustive are: arrowroot, aloe vera, turmeric, moringa, mushroom, ginger, coconut for coconut oil, mauby and nutmeg.

The idea is to establish clear Standards and Compliance Research protocols for entities wishing to explore the extraction of plant based medicine. This Research Only programme will be for twenty four months minimum, after which Professor O'Garro is expected to advise on pathways to develop a full fledged plant base medicinal extraction industry. This will certainly support the first phase of the industry which touches and concerns medicinal cannabis extraction.

We have started meetings with local herbalist; will be meeting our local chemistry and biology experts. This is a part of the next generation of agriculture. We already have the Plant Breeding legislation to protect the rights of plant breeders, this will attract scientist who will be able to improve the genetics of a wide variety of plants for use in the plant base medicine extraction sector.

Mr. Speaker, finally the ***Canadian Farm Workers and the impact of COVID 19.***

In 2019, the Canadian Farm Workers Program had 396 active employee contracts.

In 2020, while it is anticipated that all farms will request the

workers who worked in 2019 and more, the COVID 19 pandemic has caused a significant delay in the recruitment process.

The first charter with Vincentian workers left St. Vincent and the Grenadines on May 12th, with 130 contracted workers;

The second charter was on June 4th with 77 contracted workers.

A third Charter is being arranged.

Under new COVID 19 policies established by the Government of Canada, all workers must undergo a 14-day quarantine before commencing works.

- Employers are required to assist workers with arrangements to obtain necessary supplies during the 14 day quarantine period and to provide accommodation.
- Employers have been mandated to pay wages of 30 hours per week, during the 14 day quarantine period
- The Canadian Government has approved a CAN\$1,500.00 grant, per worker for eligible employers, to help them with the costs associated with the mandatory 14-day quarantine period.
- While in Canada, workers are covered by the relevant Provincial Medical Insurance. Further, supplementary insurance has been arranged for workers from the Eastern Caribbean to cover cost which may be incurred from COVID related conditions.

Over the past 8 years, we have trained a cadre of young persons in basic agriculture at all the agriculture stations. This initiative has started and will next week will involve see the stations at Wallilabou, Three Rivers, Orange Hill and Perseverance added. Persons will obtain a Certificate of Competence in basic agriculture upon completion of the training. Employers for the Canadian Farm Workers contract have selected persons on many occasions simply because they have

a reference that they were trained already in basic agriculture technology and methods. For this year, part of the project will be done at the station and on farm.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I thank, all food producers and stakeholders. The region and the World is watching and commending. The backbone is agriculture and fisheries and we have to be resolute and resilient, creative and active, stern and forceful.

The Cabinet continues to provide significant support. This is a working government and we will continue to support the vulnerable and all in need; and will support producers and other stakeholders to increase production and productivity. Life and living must continue.



TOILET BATHROOM



WAN HELPS



Ministerial Statement

by

The Honourable Robert T. L.V. Browne

Minister of Health, Wellness and the Environment

Mr. Speaker:

I am giving this Ministerial Statement a few short days after the release of a video in which my friend and former cricket teammate at the Under-15 level Sedan Nanton shared his experience with COVID-19, and how he recovered from it. I would like to thank Mr. Nanton for going public with his story and thereby contributing to general knowledge and understanding about the disease. Sedan's story is inspiring and constructive in our current context of dealing with the challenges associated with the ongoing pandemic.

Sedan had the reputation of a hard-hitting batsman who blasted many big sixes. I checked the archives and found an article that was published in the Vincentian Newspaper of December 23, 1999. I have a copy of the article in my hand right now. The article was about a Windward Islands Cricket Competition which had just concluded in SVG. The article pointed out that in relation to that competition Sedan was SVG's MVP, the MVP for the entire tournament and the highest run scorer in the competition.

I am making the point here that the people who have been affected by COVID-19 are people who may be connected to us and who may have achieved great things. We must be there for them. The video ended with me saying that Sedan hit COVID-19 for 6. I saw that someone who shared the video on social media picked up on this line and made the point in the language of the metaphor that as a society we could all hit COVID-19 for 6, and that is precisely my message for this Honourable House today.

Strategy for Responding to COVID-19

Mr. Speaker,

In response to COVID-19, SVG has employed an intelligent and comprehensive strategy carefully calibrated and tailored to our circumstances that follows the Science and advice and Guidance from reputable public health institutions such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) and the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CAPRHA). The comprehensive strategy is based on 3 basic principles or pillars of how to control this disease as espoused by the WHO: basic public health surveillance; community education, knowledge and empowerment; and strengthened healthcare capacity to treat cases, while the world works feverishly to come up with a vaccine in the medium to long term. This is the core of the strategy. There is a lot of information and science that could be developed around it. But this is the essence. [WHO Media Briefing on May 11, 2020]

I said recently at this year's World Health Assembly which was held by videoconference that our strategy can be summed up in a few short lines:

- i) **Finding Cases and Isolating Them**
- ii) **Taking Special Precautions with High Risk Groups** (such as travellers and exposed persons because they might be cases): This entails contact tracing, quarantine, etc. We have to make sure individuals are free from virus

material before they are released into the public. I should mention here the fact that we passed legislation that strengthened our position with respect to the implementation of quarantine and we have at our disposal 2 facilities for public quarantine. All these matters have financial implications.

- iii) **Providing Appropriate Clinical Care:** This covers for example training exercises, Construction of Isolation Centre, purchase of equipment and supplies, etc.
- iv) **Applying General and Specific Infection Prevention and Control Measures as guided by the Science** (i.e. the Science surrounding the behaviour of the virus, its impact on the human body, how it spreads, etc): covering areas like hand hygiene; respiratory etiquette; physical distancing (with all its applications such as closure of schools which are now being re-opened in a phased way, advisories on mass gatherings including church services, restrictions on vans which are now being eased, etc); use of masks in specified situations; etc. The application of these measures requires a supply of PPE, etc. We have gone to great pains to protect health workers.

I went on to make the point that fighting COVID-19 is like fighting a fire and that we have to go after it aggressively and snuff it out. We have to make sure it under control and contained. We have to attack it wherever it is burning. We must ensure that there are no undetected embers that can cause a flare up. We have to protect vulnerable segments of the population and take precautions. The ultimate objective is to put it completely out.

SVG never entered lockdown but we implemented a raft of social and public health measures. We were careful not to opt for a full blown lockdown because we recognised that the associated stringent measures have detrimental socioeconomic effects. We built our response on a foundation of public trust through advisories and other appropriate actions. We have been managing risks with the aim of maximising the health, freedom, rights, economic, social and other benefits to the population.

We never closed our borders, but we were of course affected by the suspension of the regional and international flights. Incidentally, this COVID-19 pandemic has taken a massive toll on passenger arrivals. I looked at the numbers and will present an analysis of them in a different forum in due course. It must be emphasised that the fact that we didn't do lockdown and never closed our borders doesn't mean we did nothing. Nothing could be further from the truth. We put an elaborate regime of screening and quarantine and other measures in place, as already mentioned.

We had to keep our borders open to allow for essential travel and cushion the effects of the pandemic. We facilitated repatriations into and out of SVG. If we had slammed our doors shut, what would have become of the Turkish nationals who were recently picked up at AIA? or the British citizens who left our shores under similar arrangements? What about our students who came home from Jamaica, Barbados and elsewhere and other groups of Vincentians such as those who returned from Tortola? What would have become of the Vincentians on cruiseships? We also maintained some passenger traffic through yachts and chartered flights.

In this world of reduced mobility, we should place on record the fact that One Caribbean and GEM Star are playing heroic roles in facilitating the movement of people and cargo by air and sea respectively.

Lifting Lockdowns

Mr. Speaker,

The world is currently having a discussion about lifting lockdowns in a phased way. The WHO says that we should ask ourselves 3 questions when contemplating an ease of restrictions:

- Is the epidemic under control?
- Can the healthcare system cope with any possible resur-

gence in cases that may arise after measures are relaxed?

- Is the public health surveillance system able to detect and manage cases and contacts and identify resurgence of cases?

These questions formed the basis of 6 WHO Criteria for Consideration with Respect to Lifting Lockdown [WHO Media Briefing on May 6, 2020]:

- i) Surveillance is Strong, Cases are Declining and Transmission is controlled
- ii) Health System Capacities are in place to detect, isolate, test and treat every case and trace every contact
- iii) Outbreak risks minimised in special settings like health-care facilities and nursing homes
- iv) Preventive measures in place in workplaces, schools and other places where it is essential for people to go
- v) Importation risks can be managed
- vi) Communities are fully educated, engaged and empowered to adjust to the new norm

We were always in a reasonable position with respect to these criteria and that underscores why it was not necessary for us to enter lockdown or close our borders in the first place, especially considering the hardship ramifications.

Return to Regional Travel and New Protocols

Mr. Speaker,

SVG (and the Caribbean) is now at the stage where it is preparing for the resumption of regular regional and international commercial flights by a unified approach. Air Canada has already indicated that it would resume commercial flights to SVG in July. We have similar news from America Airlines. Accordingly, we have to put the relevant protocols and arrangements in place. Cabinet duly just approved protocols for **general travellers** to take effect July 1.

The objectives of these protocols:

- i) Establish the risk of the arriving traveller introducing new COVID-19 to SVG
- ii) Minimise exposure of residents of SVG to new COVID-19
- iii) Early identification of potential exposure to new COVID-19
- iv) Early containment of new COVID-19

I would like to mention a few highlights from the protocols. All passengers arriving in SVG during the month of July would be PCR-tested for COVID-19. The situation would be reviewed at the end of that month to determine if the arrangements should be maintained or replaced by a system of select tests on passengers from certain jurisdictions depending on risk assessment.

A CARICOM travel bubble comprising Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, BVI, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, SVG and Trinidad and Tobago is proposed for implementation on August 1. Travellers within this bubble would not be required to do PCR tests.

The Cabinet also approved 2 other protocols:

- Protocol for Entry to SVG via Yachts which permits **On-board Quarantine** effective today: it is now possible for yacht visitors to quarantine onboard their vessels. Previously, they were required to complete quarantine on-shore.
- Protocol for **Working Quarantine**

Additionally, there are some other protocols currently in force:

- Repatriation of Vincentian Crewpersons
- Repatriation of Vincentians residing in foreign countries

- Repatriation of Vincentians deported from foreign countries

In addition to what is happening in relation to flights:

- i) We have already initiated the phased re-opening of schools (which was hinged on our capacity for infection prevention and control)
- ii) The shift work system in the public service has been discontinued and we have taken up the WHO Guidance for Workplaces/Workplace Guidelines
- iii) Vans are returning to full capacity in stages
- iv) SVG pioneered the return to live sports action with the VPL. We even preceded the Champions League.

We had to temporarily close the Kingstown Clinic, but it has since been reopened. I noted with great interest that on May 6 the WHO in conjunction with UNICEF and the International Federation of the Red Cross published guidance for countries on how to maintain community-based healthcare in the context of COVID-19. The Female Medical Ward which was shuttered would be re-opened.

In somewhat related news, we achieved the re-opening of the Georgetown hospital which was closed for a period for repairs. Work on SMART healthcare facilities in Barrouallie and also Mayreau has commenced. Things are happening in Health. We are on the Move in Health.

Facts About COVID-19 in SVG

I would now like to share with this Honourable House and by extension the public some general information about the situation with respect to COVID-19 in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

- As of last night, 746 persons were tested for COVID-19 (this does not include re-tests of any sort) – 717 negative results and 29 confirmed cases. Our testing rate compares favourably with the testing rate of other countries

in the OECS.

- 29 confirmed cases: 26 recovered, 3 active and no deaths [Mr. Speaker, you may appreciate that these numbers are well shy of the predictions that were proffered on radio by an Honourable Member of this House from the other side]
- 19 of the 29 confirmed cases can be traced to cruiseships (11 from recent repatriations and 8 from earlier arrivals via air)
- 6 of the 29 cases formed part of a cluster discovered in a local community the last case of which was found on May 19.
- There were 4 other cases.
- We have not seen any positive cases (apart from those discovered among Vincentians who came home on cruise-ship) since May 19.
- Number of Persons currently in Quarantine: 182

General Information

I would like to make some general statements:

- We now have at our disposal an Isolation Centre with 24 negative pressure beds and 6 ventilators. The centre was built at a cost of \$1.6 million (the figures are to be finalised). This does not include the cost of the land which would run another million or so dollars – we are paying for it through rent under lease-to-own arrangements. Nor does it factor in the cost of supplies and equipment for which a provision was made in the Estimates. It also does not include recurrent costs (like accommodation and meals for Cuban Brigade, salaries for local staff and consumables).

I visited the Isolation Centre on several occasions. It has many special features including automated soap dispensers and faucets. The toilets can be flushed by just waving your hands over them. It is really state of the art.

Fortunately, all our COVID-19 cases have been mild and

were able to be isolated under medical care at home. This means that the capacity of our health system to deal with cases was not exceeded. We are now fully equipped and able to manage all types of cases if that should become necessary.

- We have an adequate supply of personal protective equipment for all healthcare workers at all facilities.
- We will officially commence in-country PCR tests for COVID-19 here on Wednesday, June 24, 2020 at a specially prepared Lab Annex. We currently have the capacity required supplies to do over 8,000 tests (which is important considering the impending resumption of flights).
- 50 doses of the Cuban drug Interferon which was purchased by the Ministry of Health, Wellness and the Environment would arrive in SVG today.
- We say thanks to everyone who helped us with our COVID-19 Response. A couple of them deserve to be mentioned: Taiwan has given a support package worth over \$1million. PAHO is giving us support valued at hundreds of thousands of dollars. We have had support from Cuba, Venezuela, the local private sector (BOSVG, FCIB, Sagicor, Courts, Digicel, FLOW, Rubis, etc.) and charities and well as individual citizens.

Conclusion

Sedan Nanton in his recorded statement gave a ringing endorsement of how the government has been managing the COVID-19 pandemic and urged Vincentians to follow the relevant protocols and advice from nurses and other health professionals. I ask you to reflect on these words and remember the slogan of the Ministry: your Health is a shared responsibility. Everyone has a role to play. You can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 by doing some simple actions as advised by the WHO:

1. Wash hands frequently
2. Avoid touching eyes, mouth and nose
3. Cover cough with bend of elbow or tissue
4. Avoid crowded places
5. Stay home if unwell (even with slight fever or cough)
6. If you have a fever, cough or difficulty breathing – seek medical care (but call first)
7. Stay informed from Ministry of Health, Wellness and the Environment

The Ministry would keep you informed. Thank you for your attention. We will beat this coronavirus pandemic together. In the words of our national anthem – our faith will see us through. This could be our finest hour as a nation. God bless St. Vincent and the Grenadines.



Robert Brown, Minister of Health

Skibdo Cassar, Minister of Agriculture

Camille Gonsalves, Minister of Finance

Implementing the Recovery & Stimulus Package

On 7th April 2020, less than one month after the country's first recorded case of Coronavirus infection, the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines passed a Supplementary Appropriation Act to fund its COVID-19 Recovery & Stimulus Package. This Package, at almost 4% of the national Gross Domestic Product, was a creative and decisive attempt to address the multifaceted socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On 22nd June, 2020, two-and-a-half months after the enactment of the Supplementary Appropriation Act, the Ministers of Agriculture, Finance and Health addressed Parliament to provide updates on the Government's progress in implementing the Recovery & Stimulus Package. Those updates, delivered as Ministerial Statements to the House of Assembly, are collected in this publication.

Read collectively, the three Ministerial Statements provide an informative snapshot of the on-going national response to the pandemic. The Statements focus on achievement of the Government's policy objectives of improving the preparedness of the public health system; crafting an inclusive response to vulnerable and productive sectors of society; and implementing a targeted stimulus programme to accelerate economic recovery.

