

We can accomplish what we will!

2013 Independence Message

By The Hon. Arnhim Eustace

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As I write this message today Monday 21st October 2013, a good friend of mine is sitting in the departure lounge at ET Joshua Airport. For more than 20 years, he has run a small business here, in addition to farming. He was not himself when I spoke to him this morning. He does not want to leave his young family, but he must. He has secured a job on a ship because his small business is floundering; aboard ship, he will be able to meet his mortgage and other family expenses. It is paramount that he should stand on his own feet; that he should maintain his independence.

My son, Ajene was born in 1979, about 6 months before St. Vincent and the Grenadines attained Independence. He, like Independent SVG, turned 34 this year. He lives in New Jersey in the USA with his wife, Ijeoma, and their children.

Ajene is a civil engineer and Ijeoma is a secondary school history teacher. As young middle class professionals, they are directly impacted by the US economic recession. Two years ago, Ajene's firm cut its workweek to 4 days, in other words a firm-wide 20% salary reduction. Last year, Ijeoma was one of literally thousands of teachers laid off in New Jersey. Ajene and Ijeoma are repaying their university student loans and mortgage while meeting the staggering costs of child care and property tax.

Thankfully, they have both returned to full employment. In the interim, they never once failed to service their main obligations. They did so by prioritising – rational folk do this. Ajene and Ijeoma are by no means unique. They did what many in St. Vincent are doing (thousands of our unemployed youth, however, simply cannot make do). Ajene and Ijeoma cut costs by eliminating extras like cable tv and dining out. They cut down on travel and other discretionary spending. In

this way, the mortgage never went unpaid, and they still ate healthy organic foods. Likewise none of their education expenses went unpaid.

I expected as much of my country at 34: that we would soberly decide what was most important and eliminate and/or cut down on the rest. Frankly, if we don't we shall lose our independence. I expected that we would control our government expenditure, by stepping up efforts to cut out waste and corruption and improve efficiency, with a view to operating on a current account surplus. To so manage our overall deficit as to keep it in line with accepted international norms. To foster an environment that encourages private sector growth by among other things, repaying our government's debt to the private sector, thereby stemming the haemorrhage of private sector layoffs and creating new employment for our thousands of jobless young people.

Instead, the airport project at Argyle is treated with all importance while necessities like quality healthcare and support for agriculture and other productive sectors are ignored. Now, it is habit to thrust our cupped hands toward certain foreign powers that dangle trinkets.

If we do not make an about turn immediately we shall march inexorably to colonization. We shall become an economic colony – selling the primary good and buying the finished product; our very labour shall be our biggest export; foreign entities shall own our indigenous enterprises.

Let's stand once more on our own feet. We can accomplish what we will.

May we keep our Independence!