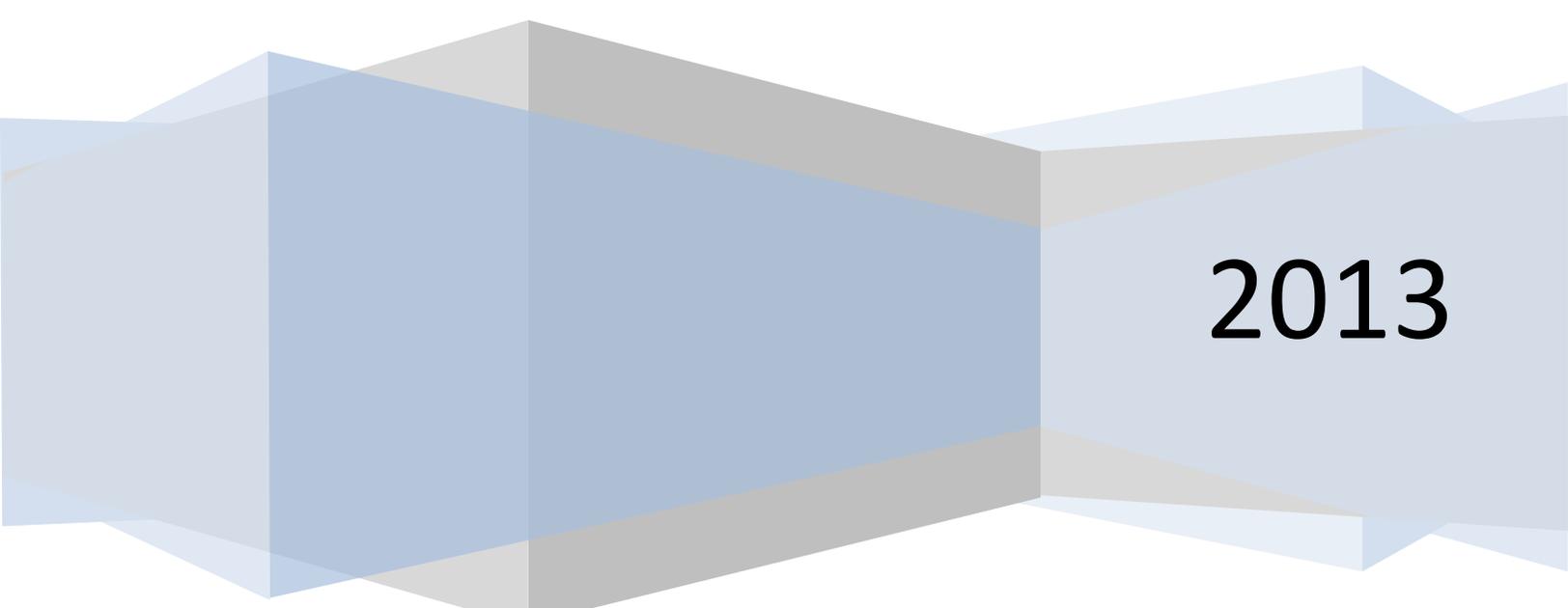


Diaspora Policy of the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines

**As one people in many lands we shape our nation
with many hands**



2013

Vincentian Diaspora

The definition of a citizen of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is outlined in Chapter VII of the Constitution of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (1979). Persons born in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and their children are automatically citizens of the country. Spouses of Vincentians and persons who renounce their citizenship in order to acquire citizenship in another country can make application to be registered as a citizen; additionally, citizens of the Commonwealth who reside in St. Vincent and the Grenadines for more than seven years can apply for Citizenship.

A Diaspora is defined as “the movement, migration, or scattering of people away from an established or ancestral homeland or people dispersed by whatever cause to more than one location”. For the purpose of this Diaspora policy, the Vincentian Diaspora includes the Garifuna Community, descendant of the Caribs who were exiled from St. Vincent and the Grenadines by the European and today consider St. Vincent and the Grenadines their ancestral home. They could be considered the first Diaspora community of St. Vincent and the Grenadines

The concept of Diaspora is used to describe that fraction of a country’s population that has migrated to different places throughout the world. Diaspora contribution is not a new phenomenon, as many developing countries have depended on their Diaspora as a means of livelihood and to aid in poverty reduction. Diasporas have made important economic, cultural, political and intellectual contributions to the development of their homeland. They contribute significantly by sending remittances to relatives, friends and engaging in other initiatives such as investing in community projects and joint business partnership in their home country. Statistics have shown that these contributions represent an important source of external capital for developing economies, and in many instances surpassing revenues for foreign direct investment and overseas development aid.

From the perspective of the Government of SVG, the maintenance of a Diaspora identity is tied to the state’s ability to promote among emigrants and their descendants a sense of belonging that, although they reside in another country, they still have a home in their land of birth.

Background

During the celebration of Vincy Homecoming 2009, an appeal was made by Government officials for Vincentians to pause and reflect on our rich history, to consider our successes and failures over the past thirty years and to develop a roadmap for unifying all

Vincentians to dialogue and plan for the future growth and development of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. We considered the tremendous contribution made by our Vincentian Diaspora to nurture and also promote a “Vincentian identity” and we endeavoured to include them as part of our national renaissance under the theme “As one people in many lands, we shape our nation with many hands.”

This exemplifies the position of the government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines that the Vincentian Diaspora is an integral component of the Vincentian civilization. Over the past ten (10) years, the government has put certain institutional arrangements in place to augment the relationship with its Diaspora. In 2001, the government took steps to provide enhanced service to the US Diaspora by establishing a consulate in New York City. Prior to 2001, the Permanent Mission to the United Nations also had responsibility for addressing the consular needs of Vincentians in the New York metropolitan area. In Toronto, instead of an individual serving as Consul General while coordinating the OECS Farm Workers Program, a separate, fully staffed Consulate was established in 2001. In 2007, the Regional Integration and Diaspora Unit (RIDU) was established in the Office of the Prime Minister with responsibility for the development of strategic partnership with Vincentians in the Diaspora.

By placing RIDU in the office of the Prime Minister, it identified the Prime Minister as the Minister with responsibility for Diaspora Affairs. It also sends the appropriate signals to the Diaspora about the importance attached to the relationship. These were tangible manifestations of the government’s desire to effectively service the needs of its Diaspora while providing an avenue for greater participation in the growth and development of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Migration Patterns

St. Vincent and the Grenadines did not cultivate the consciousness of a “dispersed people” among its emigrants. We live in an ever-changing global environment where people will migrate from one place to another. It is well established that in the past, Vincentians returning home for festivals or vacations were referred to as “foreigners”. *We have Vincentians Living in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Europe, Africa, Asia and throughout the Caribbean. Indeed, Vincentian can be found in every corner of this earth.* Thus, this government continues to stress the need for common understanding of the concept of home for Vincentians.

Current role of the Government with the Diaspora

With the attainment of independence on October 27th, 1979, the conduct of foreign policy became the responsibility of the locally elected government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Initially, the focus was on establishing Permanent Missions to International Organization and diplomatic offices in countries traditionally close to the Caribbean. The Minister of Foreign Affairs was named as non-resident Ambassador to the United States, and a High Commission was opened in London. It was not until 1992 that an Embassy was opened in Washington DC; in a country which is the adopted home for the majority of the Vincentian Diaspora.

The Embassy in Washington was instrumental in the establishment of an umbrella organization COSAGO with the initial objective of coordinating events held by the over twenty (20) organizations in New York City to avoid conflicts arising. This umbrella body is still active today. This Embassy also established a cultural Symposium Committee in New York City to assist with the organization of two cultural Symposiums designed to get Vincentians in the Diaspora to discuss their cultural identity. This Committee became the Diaspora committee of New York City

The Consulate in New York City was very successful with its establishment of a committee to help persons in St. Vincent and the Grenadines suffering with renal failure. This committee organized annual gospel programs that provided funds to support persons on Dialysis.

The High Commission in London has also actively engaged the Vincentian Diaspora in the United Kingdom. The High Commission is working in conjunction with two organizations based in the UK which assist with charitable projects in St Vincent and the Grenadines. These are 'Saint Vincent and the Grenadines-UK Outreach' (SVG-UK Outreach) and 'St. Vincent Children's Aid and Welfare Fund - charity no. 287371'. This 'Sponsor a Vincy Child' project was launched in February 2010. SVG-UK Outreach encourages potential donors to support the project while the charity receives donations through its account.

The consulate in Toronto has initiated a program geared towards business development in the Diaspora This office continues to work with the various organizations in Canada with their fund raising ventures and takes the lead in coordinating relief efforts in the event of

a disaster. All of the Government's overseas offices provide consulate services for the Vincentian Diaspora mainly through facilitating the renewal of Vincentian passports.

In 2009, RIDU organized the year long "Vincy Homecoming" initiative. Vincy Homecoming was an ambitious programme geared towards achieving the following results: -

- An appreciation by the Vincentians (Diaspora and local) of who they are as Vincentians.
- Elucidation of a Vincentian identity.
- A forum for dialogue among Vincentians (Diaspora and local)
- Development and/or strengthening of community organizations in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and its Diaspora
- An appreciation for Vincentian culture
- A roadmap for continuing engagement with the Vincentian Diaspora

Current Role of the Vincentian Diaspora

Remittances can easily be identified as the area where the Vincentian Diaspora makes the greatest contribution to St. Vincent and the Grenadines currently. Remittances have become the fastest growing and most stable source of capital flow and foreign exchange in Latin America and the Caribbean region to pay for basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter and medicine. The Migration Policy Institute for the Department of International Development (MPI) in Washington DC conducted a comprehensive study captioned "Beyond remittances: The role of Diaspora in Poverty Reduction in their Country of Origin". The Caribbean is seen as one of the main recipient of remittances in the World.

Institutions like Western Union and Money Gram control a sizable share of the remittance market in the Latin America and Caribbean region. While these formal channels, including the financial institutions (Banks and Credit Union) have been used, remittances to SVG have mainly been through informal channels. As a result, the remittance market is seen as being underdeveloped. The informal nature of transfers and the lack of full and reliable data on remittances make it difficult for developing economies to capture its true developmental impact.

At the community level, economic and social structures funded and built by remittances help to generate local employment opportunities. At the national level, remittances help to improve foreign currency inflows and add to GDP.

Over the years, members of the Vincentian Diaspora have organized themselves into associations in an attempt to maintain linkages with the land of their birth. All of these associations are making a tremendous contribution and through their fund raising activities, they also contribute to various charities in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Vincentian doctors and dentists from the Diaspora also organized missions to St. Vincent and the Grenadines to provide free medical services.

Constitution/New Paradigm

This Diaspora policy of the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is grounded in the Constitution of St. Vincent and the Grenadines where it is clearly articulated who is entitled to be a citizen of this country. As it relates to the Vincentian Diaspora, the constitution makes provision for persons who renounce their citizenship to maintain dual citizenship.

This is an important consideration since it allows our Vincentian Diaspora to participate fully in the political processes in their adopted home countries while maintaining their links with their homeland. This is an important benefit since it also affords the Vincentian Diaspora the option to move freely in the OECS Economic Environment.

Like other Diasporas all over the world, the Vincentian Diaspora has argued for more rights and privileges, in particular voting rights and the ability to influence the political and development agendas here in S.V.G. Locals have reacted with the view that the Diaspora does not pay taxes and therefore they cannot be entitled to the same rights as the Vincentians who pay taxes. Some thereafter question why the State should invest scarce resources on programmes aimed at empowering the Vincentian Diaspora. However, the State has and continues to promote the promulgation of a national identity and culture which includes the Vincentian Diaspora.

The Prime Minister has challenged Vincentians to come home not only physically but mentally. At the opening of Vincy Homecoming he stated “Homecoming is more profound; it is coming home to ourselves as individuals and as a nation; to know ourselves and our nation’s history; to grasp the compromises which we are and the extant possibilities, despite all the limitations; to be a truly great people in a small country; and to be the best we can. To come home, to advance, to develop as individuals and as a nation, we must have self-belief, self-confidence, and a sense of self-mastery, not as “atomised” individuals but as social individuals in solidarity with one another, and with our friends and allies overseas.

We must avoid a debilitating learned helplessness and a constraining sense of inferiority which colonialism has sought to inculcate, and distort or divert our trajectory for uplifting and ennoblement.

In all this we affirm that, as Vincentians, we believe in the supremacy of God and the freedom and dignity of man. We are not better than anyone else; but no one is better than us.”

Felix Marinda – a Garifuna said at the New York Preparatory Conference “This great piece of work that we are embarking on, to shape our future with many hands, has come at a time when our Motherland (SVG) desperately needs its children, its loyal sons and daughters... let us leave this place with a different mindset; with a different Vision and with a different shift of paradigm and let us hasten to answer its clarion call of **“one people in many lands, we shape our nation with many hands”**. Let us continue to examine ourselves to become true Vincentian intellectuals who have at our hearts the country’s development.”

The challenging task of physically locating the Vincentian Diaspora must begin. We already know, as indicated by our migration patterns, that our Vincentian Diaspora includes persons of high academic training. We have already discovered that members of our Vincentian Diaspora are highly placed in the corridors of power in government offices, in the business community, as professionals and in the universities as professors.

Second Generation Vincentians are an extremely vital part of this identification process. It is true that they would have fewer ties to their homeland. However, they can serve as a pool of skills, talents, resources and training for the improvement of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Their contribution can be utilized in a myriad of ways. One such way would be by doing exchange programmes. Whether cultural or otherwise, these programmes can expose both the Second Generations to life in S.V.G and also expose Vincentians to experiences outside of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. This is necessary because when the entire family migrates and there are no longer any family ties at home, the emotional bonds fade (Palmer, 2009, pp67).

Draft National Economic and Social Development Plan (2011-2025)

This National Economic and Social Development Plan is being prepared within the context of the “unprecedented and fundamental changes that have occurred internationally, impacting on the economic, political and social environment. The global financial crisis manifested in 2008 forced countries to re-examine their development paradigm. St. Vincent and the Grenadines, like other countries has had to put stabilising

measures in place to manage reduced income and capital inflow, liquidity constraints and rising debt, consequent on this crisis.”

This plan, which is the result of extended consultation, including in the Vincentian Diaspora, incorporates the following dimensions with the ultimate objective of improving the quality of life of all Vincentians:- economic, social, environmental, political, cultural and institutional.

Expected Results of strategic partnership with the Diaspora

The role of the various stakeholders must be clearly defined. These include the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and its’ institutions, the Vincentian Diaspora, the local Communities and the Returnees.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT of ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES / CAPITAL

The process of building a Diasporic identity is complex, as there is no single way for the Vincentian Diaspora to express its “*Vincentianness*”. The government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is therefore committed to the development of a comprehensive strategy for empowering Vincentian Diaspora. The establishment of The Regional Integration and Diaspora Unit (RIDU) in the Office of the Prime Minister was the first serious approach to formalizing such a partnership. The primary function of the Unit’s work with the Diaspora is to facilitate the strengthening of the relationship between St. Vincent and the Grenadines and its Diaspora.

In addition, RIDU serves as a bridge between organizations seeking to establish business partnerships and sending goods and services to St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the Ministries, institutions or organizations that are receiving them.

Its principal mandates are to raise awareness among Vincentians around the world that the “*Vincentian Nation*” extends beyond the territory contained in its border and more crucially, by setting up mechanisms and processes through which ideas and people traffic between the place of origin and the new communities. St. Vincent and the Grenadines was the first OECS country to set up a Regional Integration and Diaspora office.

Role of the Consulates and Missions

The Embassies, Consulates and Missions are responsible for the dissemination of information about issues affecting Vincentians in the Diaspora. The Ambassadors, High Commissioners, and Consuls' General will provide information to Vincentians overseas on public policy discussions taking place that affect Vincentians at home or relevant to the developmental needs of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Embassies and Foreign Missions are an integral part of the trade policy process. They have a responsibility to initiate and establish trade links with third countries. The Embassies, Missions and Consulates will encourage Diaspora groups and organizations and local stake holders to enhance investment in various sectors of national interest.

Policy regarding returning Vincentians

St. Vincent and the Grenadines grants a wide range of concessions to returning Vincentian nationals (returnees), which cover almost every sector of the economy. The Duties and Taxes (exemption in the public interest) Act No.6 of 1980 gives Cabinet the right to waive duties and consumption tax in the public interest. Cabinet has since initiated several schemes under this Act; one such scheme is that for returning nationals.

Summary

The Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is committed to facilitating the empowerment of the Vincentian Diaspora so that they are better equipped to participate in the political processes in their adopted home land; have access to education and knowledge that can be utilized for their own development and the development of St. Vincent and the Grenadines through knowledge transfers; and to have access to resources that can be utilized for direct foreign investment in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.