

**MESSAGE FROM DR. THE HONOURABLE RALPH E. GONSALVES,
PRIME MINISTER, ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES TO MARK
THE THIRTY-EIGHTH (38TH) ANNIVERSARY OF INDEPENDENCE**

As we prepare to celebrate the thirty-eighth (38th) anniversary of our Nation's independence, I am pleased to extend greetings and congratulations to all Vincentians, whether resident within the borders of our multi-island State or in the Diaspora.

It is evident that we have much to celebrate, despite challenges. Almighty God has spared us the ravages of hurricanes and storms and made it possible for us to come to the assistance of our neighbours who have been affected by recent catastrophic weather events. We pledge to support in any way possible, and continue to pray for their safe-keeping and rapid recovery from the devastating losses occasioned by these severe weather events which serve as stark reminders of our vulnerability as Small Island Developing States whose developmental gains can be reversed or obliterated by a single natural disaster.

We must be ever grateful to God for His faithfulness towards us and for His mercies which are made new each day. We must do so by celebrating this anniversary of our Nation's Independence with a special sense of gratitude and humility, and by acknowledging the achievements which have been made possible only through His grace.

Among our most notable successes are the accomplishments our young people who continue to shine and to make us proud. Their achievements in areas such as academics, sports and culture are deserving of special mention. They are demonstrated in the results recorded in this year's sitting of the regional examinations at the various levels. Among these, the historic feat of the top performers at the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE), three (3) of whom tied for first place and for the Prime Minister's Award, is worthy of special mention.

We remain firmly committed to sourcing, creating and providing opportunities for all our citizens, including our young people, to achieve their full potential and to

excel. We are also committed to the goal of engaging all citizens in the conceptualisation, articulation and implementation of this country's development agenda.

Our people-centred post-independence narrative encapsulates the concrete and tangible, and the metaphorical and symbolic. It is reflected in, among many other things, the emphasis placed on programmes aimed at the advancement of all nationals and, also, on the execution of projects of great value and significance which express our national pride and identity.

The Argyle International Airport is one such project, the completion of which is representative of the will and tenacity of our people in the face of great odds, including the prevailing global economic conditions during the entire period of construction.

Improved air access opens up new and exciting possibilities in the areas of transportation, tourism and trade, and our citizenry is keenly attuned to this fact. In essence, the international airport symbolises the value we place on our unique culture and heritage and, equally, on our connections to the rest of the world and the opportunities to participate actively and on an equal footing with our regional and international partners.

As we celebrate and continue to chart the course of our development, let us be wise in the conduct and management of our affairs, wary of any attempt to distract and divide us, and united in our efforts to improve conditions for ourselves, our loved ones and our fellow nationals. Let us, too, stand firm in our on-going fight against those who have chosen crime as a way of life.

In the words of our National Anthem, I pray that Almighty God will " bless and keep us true."

Happy Independence!

