

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: THE SECOND TERM BEGINS

by

Dr. The Honourable Ralph E. Gonsalves
Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines



{Speech delivered on the occasion of the Taking of the Oaths by Cabinet Members at Victoria Park on December 12, 2005}

*Office of the Prime Minister
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{Formal Greetings}

Let me first offer congratulations to the members of Cabinet who have just taken their oaths. They are an outstanding team.

The general elections of December 7, 2005, have come and gone. The electorate has given the Unity Labour Party (ULP) an overwhelming mandate — some 56 per cent of the valid votes cast and 80 per cent of the seats in the House of Assembly, even though in three seats the victory margins were slim. The verdict of the people is crystal clear: They never wanted, never envisaged, a change of government; they overwhelmingly endorsed the vision, philosophy, policies, programmes, candidates, and leadership of the ULP. At the same time, the voters gave a warning to those representatives who insufficiently connected with them during our first time. In short, the electorate said to the ULP: Proceed with your mandate to extend, deepen and consolidate your excellent policies and programmes which are set out in your Election Manifesto and at the same time pay more careful attention to the day-to-day concerns of your constituents and listen more attentively to those who actually voted for you.

Our second mandate, therefore, can be summed up as continuity and change: Continue the excellent and make, for the better, the necessary and desirable changes.

In fashioning the Cabinet, in the allocation of ministerial portfolios, I have had to take account of the election results, the Manifesto to be implemented, the priorities at hand, the extant circumstances of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the challenging external

environment, and the talent, skills, training and experiences of the splendid team which the electorate has given unto me.

RESHAPING SOME PORTFOLIOS

Accordingly, I have reshaped some ministerial portfolios, created some relevant ones, shifted some ministers from some previous portfolios, and made some fresh assignments. For example, I have fashioned innovative portfolios such as “National Mobilisation”, “NGO Relations”, “Urban Development”, “Rural Transformation”, and “Informal Human Settlements”. Some of these innovations reflect strategic openings to be pursued or paths to be followed and others are more precisely programmatic in nature. Further, the allocation of particular portfolios is designed to optimize performance and make better fits of portfolios to ministers.

I thus offer the Cabinet, which members have just taken their oaths, to people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. I list them again for you, thus:

1. **Ralph E. Gonsalves:** Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Economic Planning, National Security, Legal Affairs, and Grenadines Affairs.
2. **Louis Straker:** Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Commerce and Trade.
3. **Micheal Browne:** Minister of National Mobilisation, Social Development, NGO Relations, Family, Gender Affairs, and Persons with Disabilities.
4. **Girlyn Miguel:** Minister of Education.
5. **Selmon Walters:** Minister of Rural Transformation, Information, the Public Service, and Ecclesiastical Affairs.
6. **Douglas Slater:** Minister of Health and the Environment.

7. **René Baptiste:** Minister of Urban Development, Labour, Culture, and Electoral Matters.
8. **Clayton Burgin:** Minister of Transport and Works.
9. **Montgomery Daniel:** Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
10. **Jerrol Thompson:** Minister of Telecommunications, Science, Technology and Industry.
11. **Glen Beache:** Minister of Tourism, Youth and Sports.
12. **Conrad Sayers:** Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister.
13. **Senator Julian Francis:** Minister of Housing, Informal Human Settlements, Physical Planning, Lands and Surveys
14. **Judith Jones-Morgan:** Attorney-General, the Office being held by a Public Officer.

It will be noted that I, personally, have shed the portfolios of Physical Planning, Lands and Surveys, Labour, and Information so as to accommodate the work-load and responsibility which come with the assumption of the portfolios of National Security and the Administration of Seaports and Airports. The other portfolios previously held by Sir Vincent Beache, namely the Public Service and Electoral matters, have been assigned to other Ministers.

Permit me to identify a few other facts about this Cabinet. It contains 12 Ministers, one Minister of State, and the Attorney-General. The Cabinet immediately prior to the general elections consisted of 10 Ministers, three Ministers of State, and the Attorney-General. Additionally, there were two Parliamentary Secretaries; this time there are no Parliamentary Secretaries. Thus, the pre-elections Executive Branch of Government consisted of 16 persons; it now will consist of 14 members.

THREE NEW SENATORS

I take the opportunity too, to make certain other announcements. First, earlier today, acting in accordance with section 28(a) of the Constitution of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, I advised His Excellency the Governor-General on the appointment of four Senators, namely: Julian Francis, Rochelle Forde, Ronald Marks and Richard Williams. Of these four, only Senator Francis is accorded executive responsibility. Ms. Forde and Messrs Marks and Williams are talented, patriotic, committed, young Vincenitans. Always, we must look towards the future. There are now four young persons — one elected (Glen Beache) and three nominated Senators — on the government side of the House of Assembly. And Glen Beache has been assigned the vital economic portfolio of Tourism. The ULP has kept its promise to the youths in terms of enhanced representation. A strong youth agenda will be pursued. They now constitute 25 per cent, one-quarter, of the 16 parliamentarians who are elected representatives and Senators on the government side of the House. It is to be noted, too, that there are four women on the government side of the House, namely, Ministers Miguel and Baptiste, Attorney-General Judith Jones-Morgan, and Senator Forde. The women are thus well represented, on the government side.

DIRECTORATE OF GRENADINES AFFAIRS

Secondly, the Government will be establishing a Directorate for Grenadines Affairs which will function under the aegis of the portfolio of Grenadines Affairs located in the Office of the Prime Minister. Both Edwin Snagg and Herman Belmar will occupy the top posts in this Directorate. This Directorate of Grenadines Affairs will function in consultation with the community structures, institutions and NGOs in the Grenadines. This mechanism is a precursor to the establishment of effective local government envisaged under the Local Government Reform exercise. I am certain that this Directorate will ensure even better representation of the interests of the Grenadines.

NEW MEASURES IN “WORKS”

Thirdly, the Government intends, in accordance with its Manifesto commitment, “to strengthen and reform the institutional capacity at, or under, the Ministry of Works to better address the road repair/rehabilitation programme”. To give effect partially to this pledge, the Government will appoint an Administrative Coordinator who will derive her authority from the Minister and the Political Directorate. Other appropriate measures will follow in this regard. No longer will some Road Supervisors, for example, be a virtual law unto themselves. I have removed the portfolio of Housing from the Ministry of Transport and Works to better enable the Minister to focus on the roads and government buildings.

DAY-TO-DAY REPRESENTATION

Fourthly, in order to better address the day-to-day representational concerns of constituents, the parliamentary representatives on the government's side will be required to set aside adequate time weekly to meet their constituents, not merely at the constituency offices. Written monthly summaries of the representatives' work, in this regard, will be forwarded to me and will be delivered orally to constituency assemblies every quarter by each representative. More widely, the Government plans to engage the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in a structured conversation on their views regarding constituency representation. This conversation will be aided by polling data gathered through an appropriately designed and executed sample survey.

The very making of this Cabinet and the other initiatives which I have just announced connect directly to the broader question of enhancing the good governance of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. This is a matter to which the ULP administration is deeply committed.

LOSERS MUST ACCEPT DEFEAT

I shall briefly address a wider question arising from the general elections. Competitive elections, like cricket or football matches,

produce winners and losers. The opposition NDP has lost these elections fair and square. The independent Observer Missions from both CARICOM and the Organisation of American States (OAS) have pronounced the elections to be free and fair and that the results reflect the will of the people. Those who have lost cannot seriously expect that the Vincentian people as a whole will tolerate disruptive political antics designed to subvert the peace, good order, and stability of our beloved nation. The ULP has won a landslide victory of some 56 per cent of the valid votes cast and 12 of the 15 seats. If the opposition NDP feels aggrieved about any matter in any constituency about the conduct of the poll, the proper forum is the Law Courts. Like the Observer Missions from CARICOM and the OAS and the Supervisor of Elections, the ULP is satisfied that the elections were free and fair and reflected the people's will. We are satisfied, too, that any Court challenge in any of the seats will fail.

The opposition NDP no doubt realises this, too; thus its attempt at unsavory political agitation by power-hungry individuals whose political time is fast running out. I assure the nation, especially the vast majority of law-abiding people, that the opposition NDP's political antics are cumulatively an exercise in futility. Believe me, my colleagues and I will not allow these sore losers to subvert the peace, tranquility, and economic progress of this nation. And most of all, right-thinking Vincentians will not allow them so to do. They will be rebuffed politically!

I say one thing to the Opposition NDP: The losers in a cricket match can take up the bats, pads, and gloves and walk away with them only if the losers own the cricket gear. The NDP does not own St. Vincent and the Grenadines. They have lost; they must take their loss with good grace and behave themselves properly.

WISDOM NOW AND FOREVER

The members of this Cabinet who have just taken the oaths of office and of secrecy have received appropriate guidance from the Book of Wisdom (Chapter 4, verse 7 et seq.):

*“Wisdom is the principal thing;
Therefore get wisdom.
And in your getting, get understanding.
Exalt her, and she will promote you;
She will bring you honour, when you embrace her.
She will place on your head
an ornament of grace;
A crown of glory she will deliver to you.
“-----I have taught you in the way of wisdom
I have led you in right paths.
When you walk, your steps
Will not be hindered.
And when you run, you will not stumble.”*

The general elections are over. Let us all together get down to work wisely for our selves, our families, and our nation in peace, harmony, and love.

Thank you and May God Bless us all!