

## Prime Minister Gonsalves Speaks to Diaspora in High Wycombe

27 April 2011

**High Wycombe, ENGLAND:** Dr. the Hon. Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) addressed Vincentian Nationals, friends of SVG and other interested parties on developments in the country, at Buckinghamshire New University in High Wycombe.

The ceremony was attended by H.E. Sir Frederick Ballantyne – Governor General of SVG, H.E. Cenio Lewis – High Commissioner for SVG to the UK, Mrs Eloise Gonsalves, Dr Christopher Stange – Hon. Consul for SVG to Northern Ireland, Cllr. Jane White – Mayor of High Wycombe, dignitaries, nationals and the respective Chairs of the various SVG National Associations in the UK.



**Dr. the Hon. Ralph E. Gonsalves**  
**Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines**

The main speakers included: Governor General Sir Frederick Ballantyne, Prime Minister Gonsalves, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Bucks New University Professor Derek Godfrey, chaired by Yvette Thomas with the SVG national anthem led by Gail-Ann Balcombe-DaSilva and prayers offered by Emel Thomas.

Dr Gonsalves updated the standing room only audience in the new Gateway Building about all sectors of the economy in SVG, particularly around the world economic crisis and what the government is doing proactively to create a better future for all Vincentians.

He opened with a briefing on the recent floods during SVG's dry season which has created mass devastation from Byrea to Rabacca with current estimates of repairs and removal of debris at approximately \$100 million. This is a vital set back as we have still not fully recovered from the damage caused by Hurricane Tomas last October and this has had a knock on effect.

Prime Minister Gonsalves then spoke about the “spaces that exist within international relations” and the government’s commitment to its foreign policy, explaining the relationships and assistance we have received from both traditional and non-traditional allies. SVG is a small country that needs to be creative and look for opportunities, “being friends of all and enemies of none”. He thanked those countries that have offered scholarships to Vincentians and the active part they have played in our education revolution. Half of the 30,000 laptop for every child from Portugal have been received and the Ministry of Education plans to distribute these at the primary level in the coming month.

There are large scale direct foreign investment tourism projects in St. Vincent, Bequia, Canouan and Union Island for the benefit of all Vincentians. The Taiwanese company OECC will be starting the Argyle International Airport terminal in the next few weeks and all earth works are to be completed by the end of this year with the airport fully operational early 2013.

The wellness revolution is alive and well and as a developing country we are making tremendous efforts of having fully functional imaging and diagnostic equipment locally and in the very near future a kidney dialysis unit at Georgetown. In addition, the improved infrastructure of having various medical facilities stationed around the island will help improve access to care for everyone and take the main focus away from Milton Cato Hospital.

Dr Gonsalves finished speaking about interconnectivity including our national airline LIAT, telecommunications, agricultural diversification including potential cocoa production, and transport.

Today is about celebrating the responsibility we all share as Vincentians to be involved in the country and its economic and social development. While some Vincentians have left the country and sought out different paths, please don’t forget your homeland and keeping attached to your roots.

Eight year old Ashton-Blue Hackshaw read a poem extracts from “Blades of Grass” followed by a question and answer session with the Prime Minister lead by Jamila Soso-Vincent, Reena Arielle Thomas and Ama-Louise Browne. Dr Gonsalves left several signed copies of his autobiography: “The Making of ‘The Comrade: The political journey of Ralph Gonsalves and “Diary of a Prime Minister, Ten days among Benedictine Monks” for New Bucks University library.

The evening finished with a vote of thanks from Gwynneth Hamilton, refreshments and time to speak to the Prime Minister before his departure.

**ENDS**