

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

LAUNCH OF ARGYLE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT CONTRIBUTORY FUND

by

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Introduction

Nearly four years ago, on August 8th 2005, we set out on an uphill journey.....to build an international airport at Argyle.

Today, just like the energizer bunny, we just keep going, going and going. We have been surmounting all kinds of hurdles, because we cannot fail.

And why is it so important for us to succeed with this airport project.

To answer this question, is to retell a story that is familiar to many of us.

I am certain that we all here know that we need the international airport:

- (a) for our tourism industry to develop,
- (b) for us to have the kind of air-freight services that would enhance our export competitiveness abroad, and
- (c) for our citizens and visitors to have convenient and hassle free air travel into and out of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

And as new investments are made in the hospitality industry, and business activity expands in the country, government's tax revenue streams would be much larger in future than they are today.

This is the expected spin off from the airport project. In fact, in many countries across the world, it is this kind of spin off that is normally used to justify large investments in new and expanded airport infrastructure.

These are the issues about which we ought to be speaking in relation to our airport project. We should be debating and trying to arrive at reasonable estimates of the real value to the country of the investment in our airport project.

But we all know that we hardly ever hear this kind of debate.

So often, in our discussions here, one gets the impression that some people believe that those who speak the loudest, and the most often, are those who are the most informed.

We are fast becoming a nation that confuses quantity with quality!

What about that newspaper columnist, who starts out with the caveat, I know not the subject about which I am going to speak, but I am going to speak about it anyway!

And then proceeds to fill a whole column, speaking about the subject “anyway”! And surprisingly, the newspaper still prints and sells that column, presumably as an informed opinion.

Though I know it requires more work, we really do have to lift our debate here.

Columnists and radio talk-show hosts must engage in some amount of research on the issues, and in careful formulation of their opinions, before they write or speak, if they are to help, in any meaningful way, in the development process.

I hope I am not asking too much of my people.

Anecdote: (1) Story of returning homeowner and Harmony Hall lands.

Anecdote: (2) Story of the bad-talking foreigner in departure lounge at E.T. Joshua Airport.

For example: Only a few short weeks ago, a supposedly responsible person, speaking about the airport project to our compatriots living abroad, was reported to have told them that “that project aint going anywhere”.

What then shall we say to returning nationals, who are told these inaccurate stories on a daily basis, and who now turn up to see for themselves the dramatic transformation taking place at Argyle?

Does it not matter that our integrity would forever be questioned by these persons, and many others, to whom they relate this deception?

How do we spin those stories, with a straight face, when the fact of the progress of the airport project is there for all to see?

Clearly, it must be that some persons are prepared to be engaged in the deception of those who rely on them for information, as they have apparently little or no other way of learning the truth for themselves.

We, at the IADC, have started to confront head-on this burgeoning factory of misinformation to our people about this project.

OUR PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAMME

First, we will bring everyone to Argyle. From the Windward, Leeward and central areas of St. Vincent, and from the Grenadines too, we will bring the young, the middle age, and senior citizens, to Argyle to learn about the airport project.

We mean to give an opportunity to our people, especially those from the Leeward side, to see for themselves the tremendous progress that has been made on the construction of the airport, since August 2008.

Secondly, you would have noticed, over the last three months or so, that we have started production of a colourful centre-spread in each of the three newspapers. This will become a regular monthly feature of our information dissemination strategy.

Our objective here is to provide, in the newspapers, accurate information about the project, primarily in pictures. We all know that a picture tells a thousand words....and seeing is believing!

Thirdly, within the next two weeks or so, we will launch our new web site. We expect this site to become the main medium through which Vincentians abroad, and of course, other interested persons, get up to date information on the project, at their convenience.

Indeed, we have been working hard to ensure that the site is easy to navigate and has all the pertinent information so that school children and university researchers can use it as their main resource for assignments and research papers on the international airport project.

Fourthly, we have begun the process of providing information to our embassies and consulates abroad, in the hope that this information will be passed on to Vincentians in the Diaspora.

From the feedback we have received on this approach, we know the information we provide is highly valued by Vincentians abroad who have a thirst for accurate information about their beloved country.

We are committed to ensuring that this constant flow of information is available to them.

Fifthly, we are in the process of preparing television documentaries on the progress of the airport project. These documentaries will be carried on the API over an extended period so that persons who are busy can have ample opportunities to view them.

We will also place these documentaries on our website so that persons at home and abroad can also view them, at their own convenience.

Finally, we will continue the process of updating the nation through the weekly API programmes, on radio talk shows, and at town hall meetings, as we have done over the last four years or so.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Most of us have experienced considerable inconvenience, having to overnight, or hang around at one or another of the regional airports, waiting for connecting flights to our home land.

As a dignified people, we cannot accept this as our lot in this world. When things are not working well, we must fix them.

We have set about to fix our problem; it is a problem that needs the support of all of us.

We only need to look at the neighbouring islands to see how important an international airport to their economic progress.

I can say, as the late Prime Minister, Maurice Bishop said to the Grenadian people in 1981:

“.....we owe it to ourselves, we owe it to our country, we owe it to future generations yet unborn to ensure that this project goes ahead. Further, we owe it to our friends around the world, those who have already rendered valuable assistance and those who intend to make a contribution in the future...”

We Vincentians owe it ourselves to make a contribution, however small, to this project, if only as a symbol of our support for it.

Thanks for listening.

God bless.



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