

SVG 44th Independence Anniversary Message to the Nation by:
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Royal St. Vincent and the Grenadines Police Force

“MAY PEACE REIGN IN OUR LAND”

My fellow Vincentians, as we commemorate the Forty-Fourth (44th) Anniversary of Political Independence from Great Britain, I extend warmest greetings and congratulations to you on behalf of the Gazetted Officers, and other ranks of the Royal St. Vincent and the Grenadines Police Force (RSVGPF) and its Auxiliary Force. The RSVGPF is one of the many institutions that we inherited from Great Britain. It remains one of the oldest organizations in SVG, established in 1834. Based on its history, the RSVGPF started with just three (3) divisions – each division was staffed by one (1) Sergeant and four (4) men. Besides maintaining law and order, some of the police force’s duties back then included: -

- Assistance with administration/supervision of excise duty on rum.
- Collection of Customs duty and registration of births.
- Assist with mail, poor relief distribution, and controlling district telephone exchanges.

Today, the responsibilities are far greater and diverse. The RSVGPF is much more sophisticated, better equipped, and trained to protect and serve the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines with its 1087 members. Very soon, another 115 officers will be added to its ranks after this current batch of recruits graduate from training.

I am very humbled to have been appointed to the high and consequential office of Commissioner of Police (in an acting capacity). I pledge to you with every fiber of my being, to do my best to uphold the traditions and ideals that are associated with the office; to maintain law and order, and to preserve the Public’s Peace without fear or favor, malice or ill-will to anyone.

I profoundly thank my predecessor, Former Commissioner of Police, Mr. Colin John for his service to the RSVGPF and the people of SVG. We wish him God’s richest blessings for the years ahead as he transitions into retirement.

The Year 2023 has been a challenging year for the RSVGPF. On Wednesday, July 19, 2023, SVG was catapulted into ‘unchartered water’ when five Vincentian (5) males, including a juvenile, were mercilessly and violently massacred at Upper Kingstown

(Harbor Club). This brutal incident sent shockwaves throughout SVG and the Caribbean. What we have analyzed from this incident is that the criminal elements among us are becoming more wicked and evil. We cannot let the criminals win! There must be a collective outrage against acts of criminality by every citizen. I wish to assure you that with the efforts of our hardworking investigators, and the support and information from you, the members of the public, the RSVGPF will solve this dastardly crime.

Fellow Vincentians, I wish to posit that there is an urgent need for behavioral change in SVG. The Late Mahatma Gandhi encourages us to be the change that we wish to see in this beautiful world. Therefore, if you wish for SVG to continue to be a peaceful and safe country for all of us to live in, then you and I need to make the first move in that regard. We need to be our brother's keeper. We need to be more loving and kinder towards one another. We need to utilize more amicable means to settle our differences. We need to respect each other. That includes police officers and members of the public alike. I would admit that sometimes, the way police officers approach a suspect, or a member of the public is not always the most tactful, thus creating an adversarial response. Police Officers must be peacemakers. The Father of modern policing, the Late Robert Peel echoed this when he said, "Police officers should keep the peace by peaceful means."

Equally, the public must respect and cooperate with the police while they are executing their duties. No matter how short, tall, slim, or chubby a police officer appears to be, he or she is vested with and is acting under the powers and authority entrenched in the Police Act and other relevant laws of SVG.

Ladies and gentlemen, while crimes are trending downwards generally in SVG, I am very concerned about the uptick in homicides and the upsurge in the use of illegal firearms, especially in the commission of these and other offences. I wish to reiterate that the RSVGPF is not sitting passively doing nothing to curb these unwelcome incidents. In the last quarter of 2022, the RSVGPF executed "Operation TIFOS" –Taking Illegal Firearms off the Streets. This operation has resulted in the seizure of 35 illegal firearms (of different make and models) and 251 rounds of ammunition. Operation TIFOS continues in 2023 and I am happy to report that during this current period, the RSVGPF has seized 26 illegal firearms and 266 rounds of ammunition. Amongst these were two (2) AR-15 rifles with extra-long magazines. I wish to commend all of the officers who were involved in these operations. We will not relent until our streets are free from these deadly weapons.

Over the last decade, from 2012 to 2022, in SVG there has been a marked decrease in reported crimes. As can be seen in the table attached, crime has generally trended

downwards with 2018 and 2022 being exceptions, as there were moderate spikes which in succeeding years reverted to the original trend, being even lesser than years prior. While one crime committed is one 'too many' these are very comforting statistics when compared to some of our regional counterparts. Let us continue to work hand in hand to further reduce, control, and effectively manage the vexing issue of crime. Let us all work together to create safer communities by forming Neighborhood Watch and community groups, and positively engage our young people.

Ladies and gentlemen, the youths of our nation are of vital importance to its future development and transformation. Let us continue to steer them away from a life of crime and into a pathway of self-sustenance, personal development, and advancement. Encourage them to join reputable civic organizations like the Police Youth Clubs, the SVG Cadet Force, The Girls Guides, the Pathfinders, and many more like-minded groups that can instill a sense of pride, belonging, citizenship, purpose, and hope in them.

Please permit me to update you on some aspects of the RSVGPF Counter Crime Strategy. The RSVGPF cannot fight crime alone - and neither should it be done in silos. Accordingly, the RSVGPF in collaboration with the Government and partners in the public and private sectors have joined together to counter criminal activities that are being perpetrated in several areas we have classified as "Hot Spots". During the reporting period, the RSVGPF launched "Operation Boots on the Ground" in the communities of Paul's Avenue and Rose Place where there is a heightened 24-hour police presence. As a result, we have seen a drastic reduction in the commission of crimes in these and other areas. In addition, the RSVGPF continues to conduct strategic patrols (both on land and sea) and Stop and Search Operations with much success.

We will continue these and other strategies in the coming year including Town Hall Meetings, Community Walkthroughs, improved police-public partnerships, Lectures in schools, Radio and Television Programs, Crime Prevention exhibitions, Rebranding of the Force, Increased detection of crimes and prosecution of criminals among others. In addition, the RSVGPF will soon roll out its 3-year Strategic Crime Plan. This plan would be the road map for combating crime and other nefarious activities in SVG.

Fellow Vincentians, a more developed and trained police force will be more effective and efficient in the execution of its duties and functions. To this end, my senior executive management team and the gazetted officers have been relentless in organizing and facilitating local, regional, and international training for members of the RSVGPF. Just one week ago, 30 police officers graduated from a Crime Scene Management Course which was facilitated by the Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (CARICOM

IMPACS) and the Regional Security System (RSS). Moreover, police officers have been taking a keen interest in personal development. In 2023, several officers graduated with Diplomas, first degrees, and master's degrees from various universities. Many more are currently pursuing higher educational training. I wish to thank and congratulate them on their achievement.

As I conclude, please permit me to join with the Late Phyllis Joyce Punnett and say "Whate'er the future brings. Our faith will see us through. May peace reign from shore to shore. And God bless and keep us true." Happy Independence my fellow Vincentians.

