



ORGANIZATION OF COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN BAR ASSOCIATIONS



Statement by OCCBA condemning attack on Prime Minister Dr Ralph Gonsalves of St Vincent and the Grenadines

The Organization of Commonwealth Caribbean Bar Associations (OCCBA) unequivocally condemns the August 5th 2021 physical attack on Prime Minister Dr Ralph Gonsalves of St Vincent & the Grenadines as he made his way to the House of Assembly just after 5pm.

PM Gonsalves, who is also an Attorney-at-Law, was reportedly struck on his head with an object (believed to be a stone) thrown from a crowd of protesters taking issue with an amendment to the Public Health Bill (addressing the issue of mandatory vaccination) being debated in the House of Assembly. A release from the office of the Prime Minister (August 5th) refers to him “bleeding profusely” after the attack and one of the many images circulated widely on social media shows him with a bloodied shirt.

The physical attack on the Prime Minister represents a new and unfortunate low in Vincentian politics. It brings no benefit and can only incite further violence and deepen divisions in a society still reeling from the effects of the April 2021 erupting Soufriere Volcano which caused significant dislocation and losses.

Discourage violence

OCCBA appeals to all leaders within the Vincentian community, and particularly those involved in the ongoing protests, to discourage violence and promote peaceful engagement. No doubt in the exercise of their cherished fundamental rights, people may pursue various forms of protest action, vigorously and passionately, but it ought not to extend to violence against any individual or group, moreso against a sitting Prime Minister or other leader of society.

OCCBA recognizes the sensitivities surrounding the issue of mandatory vaccination and the delicate balancing of public interests and individual rights which it entails, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic now ravaging the world, with new strains emerging. How to protect the wider public interest and preserve individual human rights remains the single biggest challenge facing Governments all over the world in the face of this deadly pandemic.

Unite to fight Covid-19.../

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Covid-19 represents a common enemy striking its deadly tentacles irrespective of political affiliation, social connection or geographical location. We therefore have an individual and collective responsibility to fight against it in the interest of our families, communities and respective countries. More than ever, the fight calls for unity, understanding, sensitivity, intense ongoing education and, very importantly, the involvement of the people in shaping solutions. Never must that fight be seen as a partisan issue.

OCCBA anticipates a full investigation into the August 5th attack on PM Gonsalves and urge that the law be allowed to take its course.

OCCBA wishes PM Gonsalves a speedy recovery and looks forward to a return to normalcy in SVG soonest. Amidst all the heat and excitement, we urge that cool heads prevail.

Date: August 6th, 2021

OCCBA

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