

**Attn. Cabinet of Ministers**  
Financial Center Complex  
Kennedy Avenue, Roseau  
Commonwealth of DOMINICA

15<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

**CONCERNED CITIZENS MOVEMENT (CCM) OPEN LETTER TO CABINET**

**“SOLIDARITY WITH INDIVIDUALS, AND SMALL BUSINESSES DESERVING STIMULUS PACKAGE”**

From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Dominica, February 2021, Civil Society and other opposition groups have focused their attention on the public health situation. These groups have recognized and enunciated the far-reaching deleterious impact of this pandemic on the livelihood of thousands of employers and employees in all sectors of the economy, including tourism, agriculture and small businesses. Even before government had placed COVID-19 on its administrative/legislative agenda in Parliament, the Opposition Party had already signaled to the world another impending crisis likely to arise from the government’s inability/unwillingness to account for \$1.2 Billion, missing from the Consolidated Fund, in the Budget cycle 2018/19. In the two (2) succeeding Budget Cycles, up to 2020/21 the unaccountable amounts have accrued to at least \$4.2 Billion.

Given the extensive resurgence in new COVID-19 cases and the increasing number of deaths, government took decisions to change the narrative and relegate “public accountability”, but relegated their legal obligations and justice to the bottom of its priority for public discourse. Not so fast, say the citizens! It is our strong view that there should be no conversation on mandatory vaccination outside the context of a discussion on the legal and mandatory compensation for these suffering employees and businesses.

In April 2020, the Opposition Party submitted a proposal for consideration by Cabinet with prudent estimates on the scale of compensation that should be paid to citizens, who were at risk of depleting their savings, or at risk of losing their homes to foreclosure, due to inability to service their debts. “Ridicule” is an understatement of government’s reaction to the proposal, to grant compensation, to businesses who had incurred revenue loss particularly during the two (2) months of economic lockdown. Government, in effect, has chosen to violate the law by depriving self-employed individuals and businesses payments that are legally due to them.

At the same time, bus drivers and truckers, farmers and builders continued to suffer in silence out of respect for regulations imposed on social gathering, and possible police arrests and charges that would ensue. Yet the Police were prohibited from making arrests of the organizers of regular weekend social events, who are connected with the government, especially on the Riverside Promenade. These events placed citizens, at great risk to spreading COVID-19 virus.

The “suffering in silence” syndrome reached its boiling point in April 2021, when the Bus Drivers on the West Coast mounted a “drive slowly protest” action, resulting in a massive traffic delay and disruption. One day thereafter, the Prime Minister grudgingly agreed to pay some form of compensation to some bus drivers.

A second phase of lockdown was imposed in August 2021 and the President invoked the Emergency Powers Act in response to the resurgence in COVID-19 cases. A prominent medical practitioner was moved to observe, with alarm, that Dominica had experienced an estimated 8000% increase in COVID-19 cases between July 31, and mid-August 2021.

The ensuing period of lockdown caused considerable loss in economic output, and inconvenience to farmers, building contractors, motorists and other middle and small businesses. Once again, the expected call for compensation from all sectors of the economy was totally ignored by the government. Instead and in defiance of the rule of law they clung to their arrogant, callous disposition, depriving citizens of legal compensation due to them, behaviour alien to the democratic culture of the Nature Isle, but symptomatic of a tyrannical demagogue.

At the same time, government placed itself in another crisis, forcing RUBIS, a major supplier of petroleum products to threaten to suspend its services here, citing government’s imposition of unnecessary taxes on the sector, thus rendering its business unprofitable. Rather than applying “good faith” negotiations, and seek a “win-win” solution, government, the Prime Minister, is/has advanced that this is an opportunity to take over the operations of RUBIS, thus becoming the sole distributor of petroleum products in Dominica.

It is public knowledge that every other Caribbean island has offered a formal stimulus package to its citizens. This includes St. Kitts/Nevis which allocated \$120.0 Million in the first instance. The Barbados, the government offered US\$1.0 Billion, as a stimulus package to its citizens. Grenada is now on its third offer of a stimulus package. But that has not moved the Dominica government which on the contrary, has persisted with an over-sized, over-valued Cabinet of eighteen Ministers; government has refused to account for public funds, while hard-pressed families are forced to make adjustments in their spending patterns. It is long overdue for government to take appropriate action to enable citizens to recover from the massive loss of revenue, and the pain endured by families prior to and during COVID-19 pandemic.

The following though not exhaustive, are some proposals that Cabinet should consider in the public interest to relieve the pain that citizens have had to endure for a long time, and especially in the last five (5) years:

- i. Reduce personal income tax to 10% for all incomes above \$30,000.00 per annum;
- ii. Remove excise tax and other taxes on petroleum products, such as gasoline, diesel, thereby reducing the current \$3.25 in taxes, in the price-build up mechanism, and

reducing the price of gasoline effectively from \$13.00 to \$9.75 per gallon, for the benefit of all vehicle owners, but especially for bus and taxi-drivers.

- iii. Expedite payment of income tax refund and other moneys to citizens, thus allowing them with more disposable income;
- iv. Public assistance grant to all citizens in an amount of \$500.00 for the next three (3) months, estimated at about \$90.0 Million;
- v. Special compensation package for self-employed persons affected by lockdowns and other public health protocols.

We believe that the above proposals are modest, and affordable, and would go some way to provide some measure of relief to citizens, and give a boost to a dormant economy. We-the-People stand in solidarity with RUBIS West Indies Ltd, and especially in solidarity with hundreds of persons employed with the company, as well as with hundreds of suffering self-employed persons and small-businesses.

We appeal to the government to rethink its strategy of ignoring the pleas of suffering Dominicans and its disgracefully partisan and derisory approach to providing support to Dominicans, and to fulfil their pledge to serve all citizens justly and equitably, without fear or favour.

Signed

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Zar Emanuel  
President, CCM.