



Ards and North Down Borough Council

Media release

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ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES MAKES HISTORY IN ESTABLISHING DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE IN COMBER

The Mayor of Ards and North Down has welcomed the news that the upgraded Consulate General of St. Vincent and the Grenadines has opened in Comber. The move makes it the first Caribbean country and first Commonwealth Realm to establish a Consulate General in Northern Ireland outside the traditional location of the capital city of Belfast.

With the approval for a full resident diplomatic presence in November 2017 Diplomat Dr Christopher Stange explained the decision not to relocate to Belfast but stay in the town of Comber, originally chosen because of its close historical links to the West Indies, as well as its proximity to Stormont Parliament.

It will serve the interests of a growing population of 1,200 people of Caribbean descent currently living across Northern Ireland as well as the 5,000 who live on the Island of Ireland.



Mayor - Cllr Smart and Dr Stange – Consul General displaying the St. Vincent and the Grenadines flag

Cllr Richard Smart, Mayor of Ards and North Down, said: “The establishment of the official Consulate General of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in Comber opens up new possibilities and we are delighted that Comber has earned this status.

It is an important time for relations between our two countries. The Consulate will allow the Caribbean population to be better represented on the ground now and in the future. There are also significant trade opportunities to be harnessed.”

Vincentian, Dr Christopher Stange, who is Consul General, said the decision was part of a wider commitment to the diplomatic network to further international relations by our Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

"Northern Ireland was identified as an emerging market with an increasing Caribbean community, peace and stability, coinciding with the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement in 2018. St. Vincent and the Grenadines' diplomatic presence on the ground allows us to work more effectively to further trade, cultural, sport and international links between countries", he said.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines first established diplomatic relations with the UK on its Independence Day, 27 October 1979, and Ireland on 30 April 2015.

For more information please visit: www.svgconsulate.vc

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Notes to Editor:

Links between Northern Ireland and the Caribbean include:

- NI hosted the first international cricket league fixture at Stormont against the West Indies in 2017.
- NI hosted St Vincent and the Grenadines' Olympic and Commonwealth athletes in the run up to the London Olympics and Commonwealth Games as well as an athletic delegation during the Special Olympics.
- 19th century Comber war hero Major General Rollo Gillespie fought in the West Indies.
- Families across the Borough were very strongly represented in the pro-abolition and anti-slavery movement (boycotting sugar, etc).
- Comber, Newtownards, Bangor, Holywood and Donaghadee are Fairtrade towns, part of the wider Fairtrade council Borough, which directly benefits Caribbean developing world farmers, including many Fairtrade accredited churches, schools, higher education institutions and government, some linked to St. Vincent and the Grenadines.
- Caribbean nationals contribute immensely to the economy and GDP on the island of Ireland with an estimated population of 5,000 (approximately 1,200 in Northern Ireland), which is noteworthy in relation to the size of the Caribbean.
- A large percentage of Caribbean nationals serve in the Armed Forces, NHS and hospitality sector, as well as pursuing further studies at Northern Ireland universities/colleges.
- Six to eight million tourists travel annually to the Caribbean across the island of Ireland.
- Various Northern Ireland and Ireland companies conduct business in the Caribbean and have assisted with disaster relief after tropical storm destruction events.
- As BREXIT negotiations continue Northern Ireland will play a lead role. There is much expertise that NI and the Caribbean can share, not just in business, sport and culture but in mutually beneficial projects. Northern Ireland is importance to St. Vincent and the Grenadines across a number of areas. There is valuable expertise to be shared as both seek to grow and strengthen their economies.
- Information on SVG's Economy: www.exportersalmanac.co.uk/countryprofiles/VC/

- SVG's permanent diplomatic presence (Consulate General) is only the fourth country in Northern Ireland followed by the establishment of other Consulate Generals: United States of America, People's Republic of China and the Republic of Poland.

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