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# CASH CALL IRE

St Vincent issue cleared up after businesses caught off-guard

By **Maria Bradshaw**

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Some members of the Barbados Private Sector Association (BPSA) were livid after receiving notification on Friday that hurricane-ravaged St Vincent and the Grenadines was no longer accepting donations of goods and material for its hurricane relief effort, but only cash.

However, following an intervention by Anthony Ali, chief executive officer (CEO) of Goddard Enterprises Ltd., the matter was quickly resolved and goods will now continue to be transported.

Members were caught off-guard by the monetary demand since the BPSA received notification to contribute goods to the islands hard hit by Hurricane Beryl last Monday.

"As usual, Barbadian companies heeded the call after receiving an email to contribute and several members pulled their pockets and contributed to purchasing food, medical supplies, sanitary items and so on, while those involved in the food industry also donated hundreds of thousands of dollars worth in food supplies," one told the **Sunday Sun**.

## Sent email

That email, which was sent from a senior business member, stated: "I would encourage Barbados to contribute either food, building supplies products, medical supplies, blankets, buy a generator or two, anything will be appreciated."

A member of one of the local food companies said: "We heeded the call, sending substantial amounts of goods

and material to the Goddards warehouse not only for St Vincent but also for Carriacou and Union Island. Then we got a further email stating that St Vincent only wanted money."

The email noted: "Please be advised that CDEMA (Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency) has informed that St Vincent and the Grenadines is not accepting product donations at this time. They are only accepting monetary donations." It also directed to the country's social media pages for its banking information.

## Time and resources

"We were upset because the business community as usual had dedicated time and resources to get food, medical supplies, building materials to our neighbours in their time of need. We decided that we were not sending any cash because we don't know if the money would reach the people who need it most," the upset BPSA member said.

When contacted, Ali, who stressed that multiple local companies were involved in the relief exercise, said the matter had been "cleared up" and St Vincent had decided to accept the deliveries from Barbados.

Pointing out that Goddards' warehouse on Fontabelle was being utilised, he said: "What happened was that the National Emergency Management Organisation (NEMO) in St Vincent yesterday in their meetings said they would stop taking donations and would only accept cash donations. I sent an email to the team – to members of the Caribbean Private Sector Organisation (CPSO) which is working with NEMO – and after

consultation with NEMO, they have agreed to continue to accept goods.

"I have shared that email with the BPSA and with the CPSO . . . I explained to them that, 'Look, people want to help, they have already started sending goods, they are sitting in our warehouse, I can't return it. So we have to deliver it'. Secondly, a large number of people called and said that if we donate money, would the money go to the needy or would it get consumed in a whole bunch of government agencies and everything else"

The CEO said he further

explained "that that's going to cause some scepticism . . . and you probably would end up getting much less".

"I suggested let people do what is in their hearts. For them to transfer money would be more difficult since they have to get Central Bank approval. So I think St Vincent understood that it makes sense to continue to accept the donations, so they have agreed to do that in writing. It did come and within an hour it was reversed."

Ali added: "We told St Vincent if they do want to cut off the donations of goods, at

least give people a heads-up notice."

He said the challenge was that the Vincentians were 'getting goods "that they don't necessarily need right now", adding that someone had shipped concrete blocks.

"There is concern about jamming up the logistics port with stuff that doesn't need to be used right now. Goddards has worked with the local agencies to provide them warehousing for non-critical items which they can store for a couple of weeks and start delivering, but we are dealing with the emergency stuff right now."

## UNION ISLAND WIPEOUT



Flattened homes and heaps of galvanised sheets as far as the eye could see.

That is what a Nation team encountered yesterday on arrival at Union Island, just off St Vincent, aboard Barbados Coast Guard vessel Leonard C. Banfield, which was bringing relief aid to the island ravaged by Hurricane Beryl.

Anxious and homeless islanders were without electricity and water as the desalination plant and the power grid were also destroyed.

Director of the Caribbean Disaster Response Unit, Dorian Davis, said they were working with residents through

the National Emergency Management Organisation in establishing three zones to distribute the aid.

Yesterday's shipment of aid included bottled water, diapers, wet wipes and non-perishable food items.

Davis reported that all of the shelters were also destroyed by Beryl. (JC)

Here, the devastation on Union Island. Inset, Davis is overseeing the relief effort.

(Pictures by Reco Moore.)



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