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15th February, 2021

His Excellency, Governor Pearce
Governor's Office, 8 Farara Plaza
Brades
Montserrat, MSR 1310

Hon. Premier Taylor-Farrell
Office of the Premier
Brades
Montserrat, MSR 1110

Your Excellency Governor Pearce and Hon. Premier Taylor-Farrell,

As you are aware, we are now eight (8) days into lockdown with the vast majority of our population and businesses closed, while essential services and workers, public and private, continue to provide basic needs to the community. I express thanks to them as well as to you and all elected representatives for their commitment and sacrifice for the greater good of us all.

We must all recognise that businesses still face rent or mortgage payments, have to meet wage bills, pay on loans etc. even as, because of a Government mandate, they are either shut down as non-essential or are on a short hours restriction, with police or military at doors and at street barricades. The self-employed are in much the same boat, and employees or the unemployed also face hardship, especially single mothers.

It should be noted that even after having suffered heavy losses in sales and exhausting their overdrafts in the past nine (9) to ten (10) months, in effect it is the businesses, and not the GoM, which have been carrying the greater strain of providing employee wages and salaries. As you also know, only government employee salaries have been protected during the lockdowns in the past ten (10) months. Most other employees have not been similarly protected and in some cases, such salaries have been partially or completely cut.

We should agree that the only party that can provide substantial help for all of Montserrat's employees during a lockdown is our Government, just as the UK government has been doing.

The following three-step approach is consistent with the UK's commitment within UK's Department for International Development's 2020/21 recurrent budget business case and MoU for Montserrat, backed by the UK Prime Minister's recent commitment to assist us in case of Montserrat's need for disaster-triggered assistance. It is also informed by the UK-funded study made some years ago, which indicated a minimum of **EC \$1,400.00** (£380.00 sterling), monthly of social welfare to support a healthy diet for one individual.

Accordingly, I now wish to follow up my February 11, 2021 letter to you with more specific suggestions:

I suggest a three-step approach as follows:

1. That a package of assistance valuing at least **EC \$550** (£149 sterling), primarily for food and cooking gas be provided for each and every citizen and resident (man, woman and child). This is easiest done as a voucher, cash grant or both, where necessary or most expedient. This method will avoid the counterproductive delay that a needs assessment and means testing would create, and makes sure that children and vulnerable persons are adequately helped up front and not left out as happened in many cases in April, May and June 2020. **With a population figure of around 4,500, this first package should cost roughly a mere EC \$2.5 million** (£670,000 sterling) **and can be distributed in a few days.**
2. The second disbursement of the Lockdown Stimulus can be dispersed within a week of the first. It will see that every household can further address food, as well as basic necessities such as housing costs, (rent or mortgage assistance) and essential utilities (water, electricity and communications which include telephone and internet service). The monies provided for utilities will be paid directly to the providers. Depending on the categories of assessed needs determined, this second lockdown package will provide additional monies in varying amounts to the majority of households on Montserrat. **This second tranche would be around EC \$4.5 million** (£1.2 million sterling).

3. **The remaining EC \$500,000 dollars** (£130,000 sterling) **should initiate a food security programme for Montserrat, which, at the same time, provides shovel-ready jobs to the unemployed (further tranches will likely be needed).** This project can address land clearing, preparation, fencing and provide storage and irrigation equipment and other infrastructure and equipment to a specific group of commercial farmers and fishers. Crop production control, pesticide management, cost control to ensure quality, affordability and year-long local production and availability, as well as a subsidized water meter programme should be initially addressed. This allows us to be visionary and address overall food security in all sectors of Montserrat's food supply, expanding the variety of produce, and help control price points for locally grown produce as well as imports.

Combined, the three phased distribution of this **EC \$7.5 million** (£2.0 million sterling) package will not erase the impact the multiple lockdowns faced over past year, but it will significantly ease the immediate economic pressure being felt by both People and businesses during this present two-week lockdown which you have enforced. Businesses will still face some of the burden of paying salaries in the period ahead but will be encouraged to keep their staff on, while the GoM gets additional time to come up with a more comprehensive funded relief, stimulus and job creating plan as has been done in the UK. In our case, where there is no established unemployment system (or a well-funded social welfare programme), a greater emphasis on job creating shovel ready projects must be adopted soonest.

This communication and suggestion is put forward in response to your appeal for bipartisan support in our efforts to address the pandemic related challenges our People face. I will make myself available to provide additional details or information which further supports the suggestions I have put forward.

In conclusion I urge you to do all in your power to address the present plight of People and businesses on Montserrat. May God richly bless you in all of your endeavours on behalf of the People.

Sincerely,

Donaldson Romeo /s/

Donaldson Romeo

Member of the Montserrat Legislative Assembly