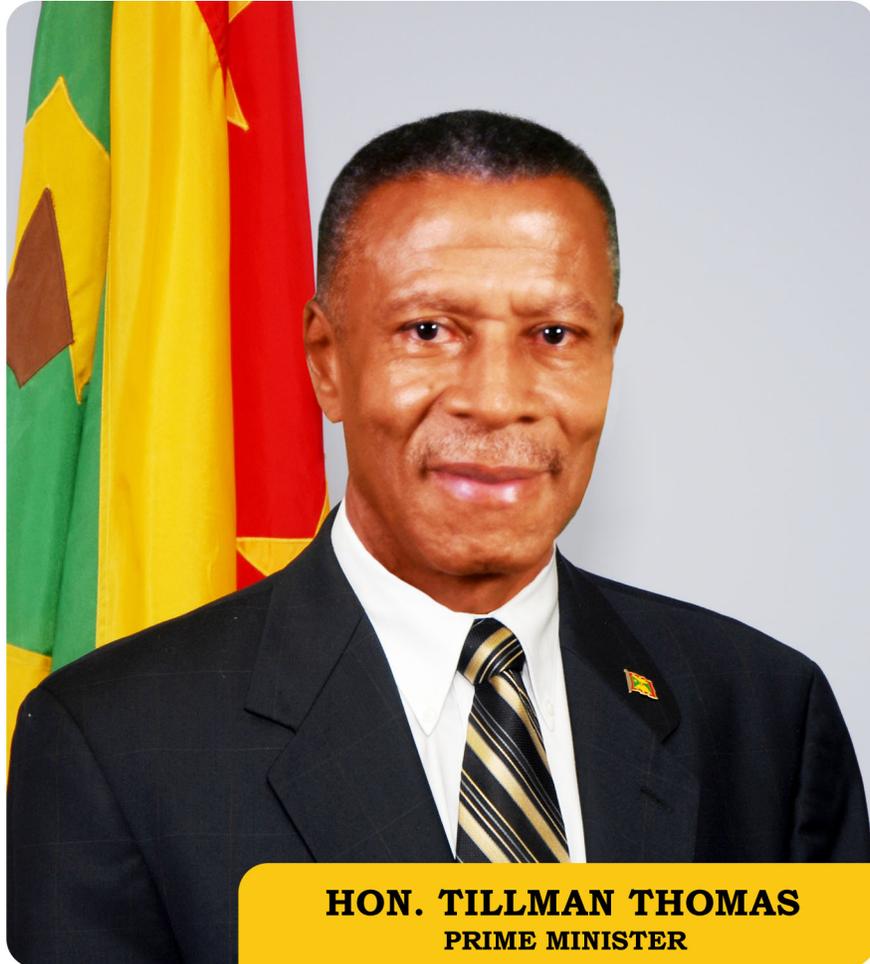




**GRENADA**



*Prime Minister's Address on the occasion  
of the renaming of the Point Salines International Airport*

**May 30, 2009**



**ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE RENAMING OF THE  
POINT SALINES INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT  
by Prime Minister Tillman Thomas**

Salutations

Ladies and gentlemen, I deem this afternoon's event historic and commemorative. We have gathered here to register and chronicle a national achievement.

An achievement, that is pivotal and defining in the annals of Grenadian history.

We have gathered here at a location where many lives have been lost and many sacrifices have been made. All this was in an attempt to bring to fruition a project that was envisioned to transform the Grenadian economy and ultimately the lives of our Grenadian people.

The search for a site for an airport in Grenada goes back to Colonial times when a number of possibilities were identified, two of which stood out – Pearls in St. Andrew's and Point Salines in St. George's. Pearls was developed in the late 1940's but it was not long after that it was found inadequate to keep pace with advances in the aeronautical industry as well as the demand for increased access occasioned by the development of the tourism industry.

Limited by the size of the runway and with very little room for expansion, attention was diverted to the Point Salines site which had been reported, from the outset, to be the ideal location for an airport.

Grenada, with its world acclaimed touristic appeal, began to attract developers of up-scale hotel resorts who unanimously pronounced that the presence of international air access was a pre-requisite to the development of the hotel sector.

The location at Point Salines had the best potential for expansion and the wind conditions were ideal. However, a number of constraints stood in the way.

The decision which should have been taken from the outset was made approximately thirty years later when the Government of Grenada led by Prime Minister Eric Matthew Gairy acquired lands on the Point Salines Estate owned the family of the late W.E. Julien and approached a friendly Government for funding for a feasibility study.

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His vision and conviction for the construction of an international airport was so strong, that he actually landed in a small airplane on the True Blue stretch to demonstrate and confirm its possibility to the skeptics.

Almost immediately after the March 13<sup>th</sup> Revolution in 1979 the bold decision was taken by the People's Revolutionary Government led by Maurice Bishop to proceed with the construction of the International Airport at Point Salines.

With generous human and material support from the Republic of Cuba via a technical cooperation agreement and funding from some European countries, work commenced. With the demise of the revolution in 1983, the Interim Administration completed and commissioned the airport in 1984 with considerable assistance from the USA.

From the commencement of this project, it was tainted by in political controversy and in a major way epitomized the Cold War conflict in a small country in the Caribbean. The project was characterized by some as too big for Grenada's needs. There were also insinuations that it was part of an international military plan.

The completion of our International Airport is undoubtedly one of the most important projects undertaken in our country's socio-economic development and history.

It can be claimed as a symbol of East West cooperation, a lasting testimony of Caribbean solidarity as displayed by the hardworking Cuban technical cooperation team and the fulfillment of a Grenadian dream facilitated by the resolve of Maurice Bishop.

The strategic and pivotal importance of the Airport, finds its nexus in the diversified structure of the Grenadian economy. The Airport was and continued to be viewed as critical for the timely export of Grenadian agricultural products and manufactured goods, the maximization of our untapped Tourism potential and the general facilitation of trade and easy access to the world.

However, there were tradeoffs. We had to give up the salt ponds from which the area got its name, the historic lighthouse at the end of the promontory and the phenomenal black and white sand beaches separated by a tiny strip of land.

Since its opening in 1984, the Airport has served us well. It continues to be our gateway to engaging the world and serves as a tremendous aid to our sustained socio-economic development. In this context, it remains central to the life of our Grenadian people and forms part of our national heritage.

A key feature of our development philosophy is the acknowledgement and preservation of our heritage. We believe strongly that patriotic Grenadians who have made significant contributions to our nation development should be recognized. This we have articulated consistently over the years.

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We need to cultivate a culture of national recognition and an appreciation of our unique history.

This is absolutely important because as a people we need to learn from our history if only to avoid previous mistakes.

As far back as the 2003 general elections, we campaigned that we would rename this airport in the memory of Maurice Bishop, given the major role he played in bringing it to fruition. We repeated this promise during last year's election campaign.

The time has now come to fulfill our promise. There are those who disagree with this action. Ideally, I would have loved to have all Grenadians unanimously support this action. However, to those who hold different views, I wish to remind you that whether we like it or not the revolution forms a significant part of our history.

You may not have agreed, like I did, with many things that were done, but the facts cannot change conveniently. Maurice Bishop was a Prime Minister of Grenada, and his government moved to make this project a reality. As a prime Minister, he was recognized by her majesty the Queen and by international organizations such as the United Nations, the OECS and Caricom.

Many of us suffered innocently during the period of the revolution. However, we must remember that all of our history is important and we need to respect and preserve that as a people. I must remind you that I have been incarcerated by the revolution for what I believed, was in the defense and the preservation of human rights.

I am of the same belief today and will do the same if the occasion arises. Equally I have forgiven and embraced those who incarcerated me. It is my view that if I could, you can too. This I think is absolutely necessary if reconciliation is to be genuine, meaningful and sincere. It is also my view that if we sincerely believe and subscribe to the teachings of Jesus Christ, we have to forgive those, who at one time embraced a political philosophy that disregarded the fundamentals of his teachings.

It is time to move on. Together we have a country to rebuild, a society to construct and a future to define. We need to ensure that never again in our country our democratic rights will be trampled and our freedom abrogated. Our march towards the building of a free, open and democratic society will not be stopped.

So as we pursue the building of a culture of recognition irrespective of our political differences, our government is proud to rename the airport, the Maurice Bishop International Airport.

I thank you.