



## **PRIME MINISTER'S 2008 NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE**



Fellow Grenadians, Sisters and Brothers all, I greet you warmly as we welcome the New Year.

On behalf of the Government and people of Grenada, and on behalf of my family, and myself, I am honoured to extend New Year's wishes to all citizens, at home and abroad.

Sisters and Brothers, we can look back at 2007 with some degree of pride and sense of achievement for we reached important milestones. But we also faced daunting challenges.

In this New Year, we intend to continue along that successful path. With God's help and direction we can work together as one people to create a future of peace, stability, hope, opportunity, kindness and compassion for every Grenadian. Indeed, 2008 promises to be a challenging and rewarding year.

The true character of the Grenadian people was clearly shown in the years following hurricanes Ivan and Emily when the entire country was put to a severe test. We passed it with flying colours much to the amazement of millions of people around the world.

Hurricanes Ivan and Emily proved how resilient and determined Grenadians can be. Those are qualities we inherited from our foreparents. They laid the foundations for our successes today by overcoming enormous challenges in their time and passing their own very difficult tests.

Let us not forget how we succeeded after Ivan and Emily. We as a government and people put our country and children first. We joined hands together. And with God's guidance, we worked with determination and a common purpose to build a kinder and better Grenada.

Brothers and Sisters, we must understand that the recipe for Grenada's success today was written over many previous generations by people who made tremendous sacrifice for their children and country. Some of those Grenadians had outstanding success and made significant contributions to the development of their country. Government believes that it is now time to recognise and celebrate the achievements of Grenadians.

In this regard, the Government of Grenada will implement the National Honours Act this year. A multi-party committee will work together to identify and reward outstanding Grenadians with national honours in many different categories.

These Awards will be presented at the National Independence Celebrations as a special part of the Ceremony.

Last year, a young man stunned the sporting world and turned the Formula One motor racing world on its head with some outstanding performances. Lewis Hamilton just missed out on becoming the first person to win the World Championship in the first year of competition.

Not only did this young man make his family in St.John's beam with pride and give great joy to the people of Grenada but he also captured the hearts and minds of hundreds of millions of people around the world.

Lewis Hamilton's success in one of the world's most watched sports has focused international attention on Grenada as never before. In the Caribbean, we might not fully understand the popularity of Formula One motor racing, but believe me when I tell you that it is huge. As Lewis Hamilton's winning ways continue, Grenada's international popularity will grow in leaps and bounds.

Today, I am pleased to announce that Lewis Hamilton's outstanding achievements will be recognized and rewarded at this year's Independence Celebrations.

Individuals will receive awards. So too will groups, villages and communities that have given outstanding service and made significant contributions to Grenada.

Sisters and Brothers, in 2007 Government introduced a number of measures to strengthen the economy and to "Let the Progress Continue."

Many of us have never had it so good. We have achieved a level of well being and development that was unthinkable two generations ago. But Government knows that not everyone has been able to share in that good fortune.

We are a caring and compassionate government and are very sensitive to the needs and challenges facing the vulnerable and less fortunate people in Grenada. We cannot just be proud of the achievements of the strong and successful and ignore the difficulties of the poor and disadvantaged. We want to lift up everyone in our society.

Indeed, one of Government's most important initiatives and programs for the underprivileged in our society was announced in the 2007-2008 Budget Speech.

Cabinet has already mandated that special committees, headed by a Minister, be set up to implement those assistance programs as soon as possible. One such committee will be responsible for the Food Basket Relief Packages.

The Minister of Health Hon. Ann David Antoine has already been asked to head a committee that will implement that program and ensure that assistance is given at once to those who need it most. That committee will be made up of representatives from the Food and Nutrition Council, the Department of Social Services in Grenada, Carriacou and Petit Martinique, the Sisters of Charity, and people from other organizations.

Next, Government will move swiftly to implement the Grenada Training and Employment Programme under the chairmanship of the Minister of Education, Hon. Claris Charles.

By increasing and improving the skills of Grenadians, this programme will better prepare them to capitalize on opportunities and new jobs that will be created by the many development projects that are already on stream or about to come on stream.

Academic development of our young people is very important but it only opens a few of the doors that lead to success. Other areas of self-improvement are needed to open the other doors.

These areas include such things as creating a vision of what you want, setting the right goals, instilling the right values and attitudes, learning self control, self motivation and other mental skills, acquiring a good work ethic, building cooperative relationships, working as a team, preventing and resolving conflict, and having compassion for others.

These are some of the things we hope to teach in our development programs.

Government is well aware of the tremendous importance of the moral and spiritual values that usually encompass and control most of the other values. We know that those values influence how we think, feel and behave.

With that in mind, Government in its last budget outlined a programme that should stimulate religious institutions in Grenada to build on the right moral and spiritual values and imprint them strongly in the minds of our people, particularly our young people.

Sisters and brothers, good mental, physical and spiritual health is only possible when the mind and body are properly developed, controlled and exercised. One of the goals of my government is to encourage young and older people to increase their participation in sport and to exercise more. Soon, Government will be lighting at least one playing field in every constituency in the country to allow people to play sport in the evenings after leaving work.

Sisters and Brothers, government is very conscious of the problems that are being created around the world by a spiraling increase in the cost of living. Recently, I took an unprecedented initiative to urge Heads of Government in our region and in the wider Commonwealth to address this vexing problem and start looking for solutions.

We are a caring and responsible Government. This year we intend to ease some of the burden of the workers by meeting our commitments for back pay, salary increases and other benefits.

Let me say how pleased I am with the professional manner in which police and prison officers conducted their negotiations for salary increases. The police officers have already received the portion of their back pay which was to be paid in 2007 and Prison Officers will receive theirs in the coming days. We look forward to paying the remainder in 2008.

We have also started paying our teachers their seniority and incentive allowances. Government hopes that we can sign and conclude negotiations with the teachers union as soon as possible, like we have done with the police and prison officers.

Government appreciates and applauds the tremendous contribution of our public officers and wants to ensure that their salaries and benefits keep pace with economic changes.

I have been receiving encouraging signs that our negotiations with the public service might soon be completed and that our public officers will receive increases inclusive of back pay in the near future.

My friends, our economy which was devastated by Ivan, is now poised for a period of steady growth. Government wishes its private sector to capitalize on that growth. Already Government has introduced a number of fiscal measures to stimulate better performance and to increase benefits for large, small and medium sized businesses. I am confident about a bright and prosperous future for our Grenadian Business Community. I am also encouraged that many business persons right across Grenada have adopted Government's policy to LET THE PROGRESS CONTINUE!

Sisters and Brothers, to ensure smooth and efficient implementation of the duty free concessions promised to taxi drivers, Cabinet has mandated the Minister of Economic Development Hon. Anthony Boatman to meet with the representatives of the taxi drivers to determine how best this can be done.

Cabinet has also asked the Minister of Transport Hon. Brenda Hood to meet with the Bus Associations to design ways and means of providing additional concessions to them so that passengers too can benefit in the end.

Brothers and Sisters, Government regards agriculture as one of its most important economic sectors. We came to the assistance of our farmers immediately after Ivan and Emily and we have consistently intervened whenever assistance was needed.

With the new WIBDECO deal negotiated by Government, our farmers will benefit in 2008 from increased markets and better prices for their produce.

We have asked the Minister of Agriculture Hon. Gregory Bowen and Parliamentary Secretary Carl Caton, to lead a committee that will meet with farmers to develop structures for the granting of concessions that have been promised for farm vehicles.

We hope that better vehicles and equipment will enable our farmers to take full advantage of the eighty million dollar diversification programme which Government has put in place. As part of this programme, a new deal with the Windward Island Banana Development Corporation, WIBDECO, has been negotiated by Government. This will open new markets and marketing opportunities for farmers.

We are optimistic of a bright future for our farmers. These initiatives, along with the new opportunities which our local tourism resort developments will create, will no doubt ensure a more productive and viable agriculture sector.

Sisters and Brothers as we touch on the subject of tourism linkages, let me say how delighted I am to see the hard work of the Government and people of Grenada finally paying off.

Tourism resort and condominium projects and developments have already significantly enhanced Grenada's image abroad. It is no secret that Grenada is now viewed as a rare jewel in the Caribbean. In the future it will attract a wide variety of visitors and will cater not just to their needs but also to the high standards and expectations of the most elite and exclusive travelers from around the world.

But my Government will not allow these developments to damage our environment or harm our culture.

In this regard, I am very pleased to announce that we have now satisfied all the environmental and physical tests and requirements of the International Conservation Community for the commencement of the Four Seasons Resort.

Sisters and Brothers I wish to make it perfectly clear that contrary to rumours in certain quarters, Government has not taken any position on casino gambling.

Any such decision will only be made after full and exhaustive national consultations with all of the relevant stakeholders in Grenada, including the churches, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

So as we welcome in the New Year let us do so with peace, love and compassion in our hearts. Let us also be our brothers keepers bearing in mind that no family that favours its strong children and ignores its weak can be worthy of that name.

No nation that ignores its troubled and disadvantaged people while watching others thrive and flourish can look at itself with pride.

Sisters and Brothers let me conclude with some words of wisdom from the Bible often told to me by my mother:

Through God all things are possible.... Remember to put him first and he will direct your path.

May I now wish you a very happy and prosperous New Year.