

ADDRESS BY

Dr. the Right Hon Keith Mitchell

Prime Minister

On the occasion of the

41st Anniversary of Independence

Military Parade and Rally

National Stadium

February 7, 2015

Fellow citizens,

Today, on this 41st anniversary, we recommit ourselves to deepening our independence so as to give purpose to the next generation.

Today, let us as a people march forward into the future -- ready to take on the next 41.

Our biggest asset in going forward will be the unity of our people.

Let it be clear, when we speak of unity, and as we continue to sound the clarion call, we are not asking for others to join our political party.

Everyone has the right to their own political affiliation, and indeed, there will be a time when we will join in political debates; but the interest of country must not be sacrificed at the altar of political posturing and maneuvering.

This is not about an individual, or a political party, or a religious group.

This is about our country.

We have been encouraged by the progress we have made in the last two years; and the projections for 2015 are even better. But we are not satisfied.

We will never be satisfied until more of our young people find work; until more of our people are taken out of poverty; until we modernize our services; train and educate our citizens; provide avenues to reduce the basic costs of goods and services; and until every family has a decent place they can call home.

We have to dedicate our work to finding solutions for the everyday problems that our people face.

The cost of energy continues to be a major concern for us. We cannot continue to support monopoly services that do not result in real costs reduction in basic goods and services for the consumer; whether it is for water, telephone, internet or groceries.

To that end, we are partnering with our friends regionally and internationally to find ways to invest in diverse services that yield more opportunities for competition; thus building that stronger nation—not just for today, but for a sustainable future.

The needs of our people are urgent and they are varied.

Housing continues to be a major challenge, but we have made significant strides in that regard. Only a few days ago, the first batch of residents moved into their new low income homes. In the coming days and weeks, we will see more of the same.

Determined as we are to not rest until we secure solid housing solutions, we have already moved forward to sign an MOU with the People's Republic of China for the construction of more houses.

This is how we build a stronger nation. From the foundation.

And as we solidify that foundation, let us not forget the ones who worked tirelessly to pass this legacy on to the next generations.

On this anniversary, government commits itself to giving comfort to our retirees who are now in their twilight years.

Regarding the issue of pensioners post 1983, who have only been receiving pension since then through NIS, the Court has now moved that Government too, has to contribute. We recognize the ruling, and we will set up a committee to engage the Trade Unions in finding a compromise solution.

My fellow citizens,

This proud nation of ours cannot be built by those of us in the political directorate, or those who work in government service administration; but by all of the ordinary people who continue to do extraordinary things in their communities.

Grenada owes a debt to the teachers and the policemen, the public servants, the farmers, the business owners -- and the people out there in the communities who have repeatedly

shown the toughness and sacrifice, that gives the nation its new character.

That is the flexibility and the country-first mentality that convinced our social partners—the churches, the business community, the trade unions, the Non-governmental organizations—to work together with Government, to chart the way forward for the future of this country.

The resolve of that group to unite for the sake of country has seen us attaining a feat of historic proportions a few weeks ago, when most of the parties signed on to a Social Compact—a binding agreement that we will always champion the cause of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique ahead of self interest.

Make no mistake about it, brothers and sisters, the signing of the Social Compact and the demonstration of its precedents for our sustainable economic growth has caught the attention of the international community.

We have sent a message to everyone that we are serious about development—enough to make the tough decisions collectively that are necessary to get us out of the economic slump.

We have been encouraged by the promises of support from our international partners.

In fact, we have been able to secure more than the expected funds to expand our safety net programmes that take care of our poor and marginalized.

It is because of that “buy-in” that we are gaining the confidence of investors and visitors alike to want to come to Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, and lend to our economic growth.

I commend our partners for doing what is in the best interest of this country.

I commend you for being leaders who believe that the work is bigger than us; and who believe that a united endeavour is the only worthwhile endeavour.

Fellow citizens, I am proud to report that PROJECT GRENADA is off and running.

We have set the markers down for different interest groups working together -- and we are continuing to do so in the context of our democracy.

PROJECT GRENADA is social partners coming together around the common table to work for the collective betterment.

PROJECT GRENADA is the buy-in we have spoken about, and the sacrifices our people have made in our efforts to turn around the economy.

PROJECT GRENADA is the understanding our trade union leaders have shown in coming to terms that even their just demands must be addressed in the general context of all of the common good.

A successful implementation of PROJECT GRENADA will change real lives in Mama Cannes and Mt Horne; in Harmony Hall and Harvey Vale.

Most Grenadians and our leaders have got it -- PROJECT GRENADA means one for all, and all for one. It means moving forward, in unity, to build a stronger nation.

Later this year, we aim to stake a fresh claim to our sovereignty.

The aim at constitutional reform is set to bring Grenada into the modern era; and to deepen the rights of its people.

We believe that this process must be completed this year otherwise it will subject itself to increasingly useless partisanship.

Consequently, we encourage all our citizens to participate in the referendum, and set the context for the future of this nation.

The true testament of our success in charting the way forward will be in the tangible benefits derived for all our citizens across the sectors.

Our citizens now have more exposure in education than they did 41 years ago—thanks to the advent and rapid expansion of Information Communication Technology. As a government, we will continue to invest in education and ICT—for we believe that those are the bases for the attainment of true independence, and the bases for enabling our children to be globally competitive.

This is why we are bringing technology within our schools, public service and services in general, and embarking on training our people appropriately to use those services.

The world has changed. The way we educate our children has changed. The way we do business has changed, and we need to ensure that we change also.

This is how Grenada takes its place among the community of nations, and makes its name on the international stage.

In April, we will host a cricket Test match between England and the West Indies. The reports coming in are that we are set for a good time. The people in the hotel sector are reporting heavy booking for the period. There is indeed a satisfying buzz about that event in mid April.

We are now asking our citizens to open their homes for the home-stay programme to facilitate the expected influx of visitors.

By the middle of the year, we will open the doors to the new Athletic and Football stadium.

Our first rate young people, the likes of Kirani James, Melanie Rodney...and others, will be able to train and perform in first class facilities right here at home.

In recent times, Grenada has been asked to play a leading role in the reorganization of the governance of West Indies cricket.

For the first time, we have also been asked to be on the CONCACAF steering committee—because of our vision for sports and youth development island-wide.

We have also been leading the region in ICT and the promotion of renewable energy across Small Island developing states.

What these roles have in common is that they recognize Grenada as been serious about all-round development.

Ladies and gentlemen, Sisters and Brothers,

As we enter our 42nd year as an independent nation, we must deepen the traits that have defined our Grenadianness – not divert from them, in the name of development.

Safety and personal respect have been qualities for which we are known.

When a young mother's life is violently cut down, this is one incident too many.

The blades of anger are not the way to settle a dispute.

When a young man loses his life in a senseless argument: we refuse to take comfort in the fact that we have one of the lowest crime rates in the region.

By the same token, tolerance and respect for authority have always been part of the Grenadian culture. As we cope with revolutionary changes in modern society, it must not mean an abandonment of our very character.

History has taught us that we get ourselves in trouble when we stray from the very tenets that have made us who we are.

In recent weeks, several incidents reminded us that we could be in danger of ripping apart the soul of the nation if we are not careful.

The public attack on a member of the security forces is not the fodder for idle joke; but should be an incident worthy of our collective rebuke.

An attack on any member of the security forces is an attack on all of us; it is a threat to peace and stability at home; and it is a blemish on our national character.

So too is the attack on a government minister.

The recent verbal attack on our church leaders is of a different character but of the same kind of meanness that must be denounced.

We can disagree with positions and even challenge them; but we must not reduce leaders to the type of ridicule, slander and vileness that we have seen.

And all those who condone it are as guilty as those from whose mouths the hateful words were uttered.

When we as leaders refuse to reprimand our own, we forfeit our moral authority to be the conscience of our nation; and we undermine our opportunity to lead.

To all those, even our own political supporters, who are not happy because they are not allowed to do wrong, or not allowed to facilitate perpetrators of wrong, I say to them: wrong is always wrong, and right is always right.

This is a new era. Because something has always been a particular way, does not mean that we cannot change course.

There is never a bad time to change direction, when it is a change for better.

Because you were wrong yesterday, does not mean that you cannot be corrected today.

We are moving forward, and we are doing so with purpose.

Our country's image must not falter on the table of political patronage.

We must take a stand for the rule of law. We must take a stand for country.

We can have a robust democratic society that challenges ideas, but is neither selfish nor mean spirited; a democracy that questions authority but does not devolve into chaos.

Respecting other people's position is not equivalent to bailing out on ours.

The jostling for political advantage is part of the art of every one of us involved in politics; but that must not be held hostage to the idea that we must do so by any means necessary. At the end of the day, we all have a stake in this beautiful nation of ours.

For what will it profit a group to gain power and suffer the destruction of its nation?

And neither must we be comforted by telling ourselves that we are all guilty of that in the past.

What we are talking about is the future. And as much as we have learnt from the past; we cannot allow it to hold us hostage.

When a people face the choice of going back, standing still or moving forward; they must choose to move forward.

At this crucial juncture in our history we must march forward as a proud people.

We are not daunted by the challenges ahead, but excited about the opportunities.

It is still morning in Grenada – and the day is ours to behold; and the moments that will unfold are for all of us to achieve.

Together we aspire. Together we achieve. Together we build.

Together – we march forward.

I thank you.