

THRONE SPEECH 2018

Delivered to the Houses of Parliament

By

**Her Excellency Dame Dr. Cecile La Grenade, Governor-
General**

On the occasion of the First Session of the Tenth Parliament

Grenada Trade Centre

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10 A.M.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

Members of Parliament,

Our Nation embarks on this the First Session of the Tenth Parliament with a deep sense of gratitude to Almighty God for his immeasurable blessings bestowed on our beautiful tri-island State and people.

We are exceedingly grateful for all that we have achieved together in recent years, and we look to the future, with optimism, secure in the knowledge that, as long as we continue to work together, we can achieve much more.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

On March 13th, the people of this Nation were called on, to once again, exercise their democratic right to chart the course of this Nation for the next five years. The result was an overwhelming mandate given to my Government to continue along the trajectory of growth and opportunities that we have seen in the last five years. This is a responsibility that my Government cannot, and will not, take lightly.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

My Government is faced with the urgent task of meeting expectations now, to reassure them that they have made the right choice.

For this reason, the task of completing projects currently on stream will be tackled with renewed vigour and urgency.

My government also strives to secure new initiatives that will create more and varied employment opportunities, especially for our young people; even while we work to ensure that our elderly and vulnerable are appropriately cared for, supported and respected.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

My Government commences this new term with sights set firmly on reinforcing the most solid foundation on which our democracy can stand. My Government has always demonstrated its commitment to the principles of democracy, social justice and the rule of law.

A visible symbol of that commitment is our Parliament Building. It is against this backdrop that one of my Government's first major actions will be to open our new Parliament Building, which was constructed with the generous assistance of the Governments of the United Arab Emirates and Mexico.

My government anticipates that within the next month, this goal will be realized and Parliament will be in held in its rightful home.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

I am happy to report that going into this new period of governance, Grenada's economy is in a much stronger position than it was five years ago—thanks to the sacrifices and resolve of our people, and the support of our development partners.

Macroeconomic stability has, for the most part, been restored, and our economy has experienced significant growth each of the last five years.

Our fiscal and debt situation has also improved significantly, and unemployment rates have declined dramatically, although we recognize that this rate is still too high.

My Government has implemented a solid fiscal framework to ensure adherence to fiscal discipline going forward, and reforms have been enacted that will help to promote higher economic growth and generate more employment.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

My Government, though satisfied, promises not to become complacent. We have achieved a lot in the last five years, but we cannot afford to sit on our laurels. We still have much work to do in order to fully consolidate our economic gains and build a sustainable future for all.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

Consistent with the promises made to the Grenadian people, my Government's main focus for this Session of Parliament will be to:

- 1. Continue the Transformation of our society*
- 2. Secure the welfare of our people*
- 3. Efficiently manage our economy to ensure the creation of jobs and a reduction in unemployment*
- 4. Promote economic growth and social progress*

Continuing the transformation of our society

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

My Government understands that if a democracy is to function effectively, people must be placed at the center of the decision-making and development process.

Further, my government believes that development comes with change, and that change must be accepted by the people before it can be realised.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

In the last five years, my Government has especially seen this to be true. The nation has witnessed the introduction of the Social Compact formed between my Government, the Trade Union Movement, the Business community, the churches, civil society, and the non-governmental organizations.

The commitment made by my Government to ensure that every sector is represented at the table is one rooted in the belief that everyone's voice must be heard—and not only during periods of elections.

In that vein, my Government is reaching out to the present membership of the social partners to broaden and strengthen the framework that has served this country so well in the last few years, so that every sector has an expanded seat at the table, including community, youth and student groups.

In the absence of a formal parliamentary opposition, my Government is again inviting the largest opposition political organization to join the partnership, and take their rightful place at the table, so as to give full and formal effect to the voices of over twenty thousand brothers and sisters of this nation.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

The economic successes of the last five years were built on the foundation of this social partnership that we forged. Its expansion can only augur well for the optimal development of this beautiful country.

My Government appreciates that while it might have won all the seats in Parliament, and while there is no formal opposition, it must and will respect the rule of law, defend democracy, and promote good governance and accountability; while fully respecting the right of the citizenry to express divergent views.

Securing the welfare of our people

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

My Government firmly appreciates that every society is complex, with a dynamic grouping of citizens, and government has a responsibility to offer protection to each of those groups, equally.

My Government therefore, believes that appropriate health care, education and housing are equivalent to liberty, justice and equality, in that they are not commodities for sale, or special privileges only afforded to some.

Instead, those are all rights to which every Grenadian boy and girl, man and woman, are entitled. As a consequence, every decision my Government takes, must be geared towards protecting or enhancing those rights.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

A healthier and more educated people is dependent not only on service delivery, but also on the appropriate use of such services, and the overall changes in behaviors that might otherwise undermine the very goal it sets out to achieve.

Making services available to those without access is important and necessary for poverty eradication; but my Government understands that better livelihoods and an improved quality of life can only be realized when government services are reliably delivered, widely accessible, effectively and appropriately administered and utilized.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

In the area of education, we will continue to reform the education and training curriculum to better address the development objectives of my Government, as well as the growing needs of the private sector. Emphasis will be placed on securing better outcomes in Science, Technology, English and Math.

Investment in these areas is compulsory, if we are to build a globally competitive citizenry, and reduce unemployment here at home.

We will also continue to build the capacity of schools' professionals, through training and other opportunities for educators and ministry staff.

In terms of physical infrastructure, a number of schools are targeted to receive major renovation and rehabilitation works, which will enhance the quality of educational opportunities and better aid the learning and teaching environment of our students and teachers.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

My Government will continue to invest in strengthening social safety net programmes to protect the poor and most vulnerable groups in society, such as children, the elderly, and the disabled. We will also support reforms to highlight gender equality and social inclusion, in order to expand access to basic services.

Given that the lack of appropriate housing continues to affect the well-being of vulnerable families, my Government continues to urgently address this critical need.

I am pleased to report that the second phase of the Chinese Low-Income Housing Programme has commenced in several areas around the country, through the generous support of the Government of the People's Republic of China. Homes are currently being constructed for families in Corinth, Saint David, and The Villa in Saint Patrick. Construction will soon commence in Beausejour in Saint George, Diamond in Saint Mark, and Dumfries in Carriacou.

My Government also continues to review and improve the administration of safety net programmes such as the Support for Education, Empowerment and Development (SEED) Programme, the House Repair and Needy Assistance Programmes, the Uniform and Transportation Assistance Programme, and the Special Projects Programme, in order to ensure that we curb abuses within the system.

My Government has been apprised that some who do not merit certain benefits, have been able to access them because of weaknesses in the administration of those programmes, or because they provide false information that the checks and balances have not been able to flag.

My Government recognizes and accepts responsibility for the weaknesses and abuses in the administration of safety net programmes, and it will be resolute in its efforts to ensure that all social programmes serve the needs of those they are intended to serve—the most vulnerable among us.

For that reason, my Government has temporarily suspended the needy assistance, special projects and other such programmes for one month, to allow for review and revamping, so as to close loopholes and better manage the services to our vulnerable, while also protecting the integrity and use of the people's resources.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

When we speak of vulnerable citizens, we must never forget our retirees.

Restoring Pensions to public officers is a task which is long overdue, but one which my government is determined to resolve.

A Memorandum of Understanding has already been signed with the Trade Union movement, and the formula for pension restoration is being worked out.

And even while we work to resolve the pension issue, we are cognizant that retired public servants continue to pass on, without ever seeing the correction of the unjust decision made in 1983 to revoke their right to a pension.

My Government is pleased to note that, while the process of reinstatement is long and arduous, it is now within sight. Meanwhile, public servants and other citizens must also have better access to appropriate and effective health care.

In the area of Health care, my Government has spoken extensively about, and made significant progress toward implementing the National Health Insurance. A dedicated secretariat has been installed and the technical details are being worked out for a full roll-out of this noteworthy endeavour.

My Government is also committed to ensuring that the country's overall health infrastructure is adequate. In that regard, retrofitting and upgrades are being done on health facilities such as the Princess Alice Hospital, health facilities in Carriacou and elsewhere around the country.

The second phase of construction of the General Hospital is nearing completion and the facility is expected to be commissioned shortly.

We will continue to review staffing and other capacity and management needs at clinics and hospitals, to aid in better service delivery.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

It is not sufficient to provide more medication and better health facilities.

My Government must also diligently multiply efforts to enhance the overall management of the health sector, and even further, mount a full campaign to emphasize the need for healthier lifestyles across the length and breadth of this nation, if we are to fully achieve our developmental potential.

As clichéd as the saying is, a healthier people is indeed a wealthier people.

Just as my Government tries to build a healthier citizenry, it must also build a healthier environment to withstand the economic and social shocks of climate change.

Of necessity, there must be significant and urgent investment in overhauling and strengthening our Nation's infrastructure. To this end, the ongoing execution of the Ministry's Asphalt and Concrete Road Maintenance programme remains a key priority for economic development.

My Government will continue its work on the Agricultural Feeder Roads, with a third Phase, which extends the network of roads throughout the interior of the agricultural belt.

Other major road projects include the St. Patrick's Road Network Upgrade and the Gouyave Extreme Rainfall Project, both of which will improve primary and secondary roads.

Additionally, we are committed to completing the St. John's River Flood Mitigation Project, which is part of the World Bank-funded Disaster Vulnerability Reduction Project, which targets flood mitigation in the River Road Area.

Other major infrastructural projects scheduled for 2018 include the lighting of the National Cricket Stadium and the La Sagesse Playing Field, as well as the installation of Flood Lighting in Community Playing Fields and Basketball Courts throughout our nation.

My Government, in partnership with the People's Republic of China, is also moving ahead with the announced plans to rehabilitate and upgrade the Maurice Bishop International Airport, with respect to its infrastructure, security and services, and the provision of adequate accommodation and holding facilities for goods exported and imported.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

As we build and fortify infrastructure, my Government must also give effect to new and existing policy frameworks that are de-

signed to protect our people and environment in this era of climate change.

It is in that regard that my Government has installed a new and dedicated ministry to oversee the affairs of all activities related to building climate resilience, protecting the marine, coastal and land environment, and ensuring that we build our resilience to natural disasters, such as hurricanes, which have become a cruel fact of life, especially in our region.

We know that as Small Island Developing States, we do not always have the resources to do what is necessary to protect our people, livelihoods and assets, but my Government will continue to be tireless in its efforts to use Grenada's position as Chair of the Small States Forum, and as a leader among small states on the issue of climate change, to access a portion of the billions of dollars that are available globally, to implement the changes necessary for Grenada's resilience initiatives.

Already, we have received significant support to aid in the development of our water treatment and other facilities. My government also intends to secure grants that will create a more resilient and sustainable St. George.

My Government echoes its call to the international community to recognise the Caribbean's vulnerability in the face of climate change, and provide the necessary development support and solutions that appropriately relate to our realities, as we strive to protect our environment and our people.

Efficient management of our economy to ensure the creation of jobs and reduce unemployment

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

Our efforts to take care of our people and our environment will all be for naught if my government does not continue to effectively manage the economy, as it has done in the last five years.

The gains achieved under the Structural Adjustment Programme must be secured if Grenada is to continue taking care of its affairs.

My Government has repeatedly said that those gains were achieved by the different sectors working together, and by prudent fiscal management and oversight. It is in light of this that my government will continue to strengthen the legislative framework necessary to ensure that the benefits of the Home-Grown programme are safe-guarded for sustainability, and are also able to reach every sector of our population.

My government will continue to work with the social partners on legislative provisions, such as the Fiscal Responsibility and Public Procurement Acts, which were implemented by my Government in the last administrative period; even while new legislative measures are enacted to further bolster growth and administrative compliance.

My Government will continue to work with the leadership of the public service in that regard.

In 2018, the Ministry of Legal Affairs will focus on concluding outstanding matters in fulfillment of Government's Legislative Agenda. High on the agenda will be the Pensions Reform Bill and the National Health Insurance Bill.

Promoting economic growth and social progress

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

My Government will continue to seek investments and partnerships for the creation of sustainable jobs and opportunities for our people, with the aim of providing employment to those who need jobs and are qualified for them.

For this reason, my Government will continue to invest in our productive sectors, by providing incentives—especially in areas such as Tourism, Agriculture, and Manufacturing.

Within the next year or two, Grenada will see the opening of several prized, world-class hotel and resort facilities, such as the Silver Sands Hotel, The Pointe at Petite Calivigny, Kimpton Kawana Bay, Hideaway Condominiums and others, which will not only significantly boost the tourism sector with increased room-stock for stay-over visitors; but will also provide full time and other employment for hundreds of citizens.

Moreover, these tourism projects have already committed to linking their services with the agricultural sector; thus providing improved livelihoods for farmers and fisher folk who will supply local produce.

New and innovative technologies will be used to revolutionize the way our people have traditionally practiced agriculture. In so doing, my Government intends to encourage more young people to get involved in the sector, as an attractive form of income generation and wealth creation.

Strategic investments in the sector will be pursued to increase agricultural productivity, enhance food and nutrition security, increase employment and income, especially in the rural communities, increase foreign exchange earnings, and promote climate-smart agricultural practices.

A significant body that will work to secure those goals will be the new Climate Smart Agriculture and Rural Enterprise Programme, (SAEP), an initiative derived from the successful Market Access and Rural Enterprise Programme, MAREP.

The SAEP is supported by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Caribbean Development Bank and the Government of Grenada. Its mission is to implement climate smart practices leading to better livelihoods for farmers and other small businessmen and women, in this era of climate change.

SAEP will also provide enterprise business support to small businesses, with the provision of technical, vocational and skills training programmes, which will significantly address the unemployment situation, especially in rural communities.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

My Government understands that these goals are only possible with the appropriate finances to fund them.

This is why sound fiscal management of the economy is essential, even while we seek other resources.

My Government is therefore, encouraged by the findings so far, of its oil and gas exploration initiative.

One well was already discovered, with millions of cubic feet of gas that are ready to be exploited; and the experts have said that there are several more wells to be drilled, which, potentially, hold even larger amounts.

The explorers have already signed an agreement with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for the purchase of Grenada's gas resources.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

My Government's outlook is one of cautious optimism, as we do not want to make projections too prematurely or quickly; however, my Government is ever cognizant that finding oil and gas is a major game-changer for Grenada's economy.

The development of this sector will give us the opportunity to rapidly develop the economy; reduce unemployment; fund our social programmes and expand entrepreneurship and innovation, especially among our youth population.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

My Government's vision is one of growth and progress, and our young people are at the center of that vision.

This is why support will continue to be provided through a re-vamped Imani programme, and other empowerment programmes, targeting the youth, even as we seek to increase their access to scholarship and training opportunities at home and abroad.

My Government is committed to the holistic development of our young people, and we are very excited about their prospects under the Ministry of Youth, Sports, Culture and the Arts.

This Ministry, in coordination with the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, must be commended for its strong support to the organizers of the second inaugural Grenada Invitational, held last weekend, which saw some of the world's greatest athletes competing on our local stage, and inspiring our young people.

Our local athletes are also being given exposure like never before, and one by one, they are showing that they can excel internationally.

Through the broadcast of the Invitational on ESPN, our country is also getting unprecedented hemispheric and global coverage and our tourism product is being superbly promoted; even as it continues to be hailed among the world's best.

Sports tourism is indeed on the rise in Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, and our athletes are showing great promise.

My Government takes this opportunity to commend the organizers of the Invitational, as well as the athletes who competed in the event.

In that same vein, we also congratulate the management and team, and especially the Gold and Bronze Medalists, who represented Grenada at the recently held Commonwealth Games in Australia. Our nation was justifiably proud to witness their performances, and their overall representation of Grenada.

Further encouraged by their dedication, potential and promise, Government will continue its work related to tourism and sports product enhancement; developing programmes in schools and communities that promote sports, culture and the arts; thus continuing to put Grenada on the map. We will also continue to build capacity among the professionals who are called upon to execute those world-class initiatives on behalf of our beautiful country.

Conclusion

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

My Government is grateful for the support provided in the last five years by the social partners and the Grenadian people. That support and unity restored Grenada to economic growth and social prominence on the international stage.

As we forge ahead as a nation during this new period of governance, my Government looks forward, with renewed optimism, to working with the social partners to advance our country's development.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

My Government has reaffirmed its priorities for this the First Session of the Tenth Parliament. The implementation of the initiatives outlined will be seen throughout the fiscal year.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Members of Parliament,

May God guide you in all your deliberations and render you equal to the sacred trust bestowed upon you.

May God continue to richly bless our beautiful tri-island State of Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique, and enfold us all in His boundless love and care.