

2019 THRONE SPEECH

***Towards Vision 2035: Empowering our Communities, Growing our Economy,
Protecting our Environment, Strengthening our Institutions***

Delivered to the Houses of Parliament

By

Her Excellency Dame Dr. Cécile La Grenade, Governor-General

On the Occasion of the Third Session of the Tenth Parliament

Grenada Parliament Building

Mt. Wheldale

St. George

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10:00 A.M.

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

As we gather here today at the start of the Third Session of the Tenth Parliament, it is important that we express gratitude for the mercies granted by the Almighty and for His grace, His love and the continuous blessings that He has bestowed on us as a nation. As we prepare to deliberate on matters of national importance, let us not forget our brothers and sisters in the Bahamas, many of whom are still reeling from the widespread devastation and hardship inflicted last month by Hurricane Dorian, one of the most powerful storms ever recorded in the Caribbean. Let us remember too that fifteen short years ago, we were faced with a similar plight, having experienced the onslaught of Hurricane Ivan.

Grenada's progress since 2004 has been nothing short of remarkable. The destruction wrought by Hurricane Ivan was equivalent to 200 percent of our gross domestic product (GDP). Despite this tremendous setback, our nation recovered and is currently on a sound economic footing, having achieved several consecutive years of economic growth that have earned it the distinction of being the fastest growing economy in the Caribbean. As 2020 approaches, we are fully cognisant of the fact that we must not only look to the future with hope and optimism; as the architects of our destiny, we must shape the kind of future we want and create a Grenada of which we can all be proud.

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

Grenada is doing well on several fronts.

1. The economy is poised to record its seventh consecutive year of robust growth in 2019. Economic activity has been broad-based, with several sectors experiencing sustained expansion in the past seven years.
2. New jobs have been created in several sectors, leading to a steady decline in the unemployment rate in our country.
3. General price increases, as measured by the inflation rate, have been low and stable, providing certainty for business investment and increasing the purchasing power of consumers.
4. Several major projects in both the public and private sectors are underway across our tri-island state and are expected to significantly enhance our social and economic infrastructure as well as build resilience to climate change.
5. Public finances have shown sustained improvement and as such, the public debt-to-GDP ratio has been on a steady downward trend over the past five years.
6. Social protection programmes and social safety nets have been expanded to address the needs of the most vulnerable in our society, including at-risk youth, boys and young men, girls, women and the elderly.

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

My Government remains fully committed to pursuing policies and programmes conducive to macroeconomic stability and social progress, while protecting and preserving our natural environment.

While we celebrate our collective achievements and successes, we are mindful that challenges persist. Indeed, long-standing constraints such as the small size of our economy, its narrow production base and heavy dependence on imported goods and services are being compounded by challenges in other areas such as climate change and rapid technological advances in artificial intelligence and robotics, among others.

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

It is important to focus our attention and galvanise collective efforts to undertake concrete actions that will allow us to simultaneously consolidate our accomplishments and address our challenges. Collectively, we must forge ahead with a shared vision, unity of purpose, resolve and determination to secure the bright future that we all seek.

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

The future that we envision is outlined in Grenada's 2020-2035 National Sustainable Development Plan, a first draft of which is currently the subject of

various consultations across the nation. The draft Plan was formulated on the basis of the contributions and feedback received from Grenadians across all strata, including youth, civil society organisations, government ministries, the private sector, non-governmental organisations and the general public. The ongoing sectoral and public consultations will help to further refine the draft Plan. The final Cabinet-endorsed National Plan will be officially presented in Parliament along with the 2020 Budget.

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

The National Sustainable Development Plan will implement a systematic and coordinated framework to guide Grenada's sustainable development agenda during the 2020-2035 period. The Plan focuses on promoting balanced, harmonious, and inclusive development in Grenada and, as such, is anchored in the three pillars of sustainable development, namely the society, the economy and the environment. These three pillars are in turn underpinned by the cross-cutting issues of governance and institutional arrangements.

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

The Plan articulates the following vision statement for our country, known as Vision 2035: ***Grenada, a resilient and prosperous nation, with a conscious and caring citizenry, promoting human dignity, and realising its full potential through sustainable economic and social progress for all.***

Vision 2035 is to be realised through the attainment of three national goals:

- *Goal Number 1: High Human and Social Development: Putting People at the Centre of Sustainable Development and Transformation.*
- *Goal Number 2: A Vibrant, Dynamic, Competitive Economy with Supporting Climate-and-Disaster-Resilient Infrastructure.*
- *Goal Number 3: Environmental Sustainability and Security.*

These goals and, by extension, Vision 2035, can be achieved only through individual and collective, concrete and strategic actions. All ministries, departments and agencies in the public sector must work collaboratively on this national endeavour.

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

The policy agenda guiding the general path followed by my Government for the fiscal year 2020, will be aligned with the goals of the National Sustainable Development Plan. In fact, the National Plan will provide the strategic direction for all national budgets for the ensuing years through 2035.

Operationally, the strategic priorities of the 2020 budget and the work programmes of all ministries, departments and agencies are framed within the context of my Government's medium-term agenda, which guides public sector implementation of the strategic actions that are aligned with the goals of the National Plan.

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

In keeping with the goals of the National Plan, the theme for this session of Parliament is ***“Towards Vision 2035: Empowering our Communities, Growing our Economy, Protecting our Environment, Strengthening our Institutions.”***

It is in this context that I present the broad strategic priorities for the 2020 budget, broken down into four thematic areas, the first of which is **Empowering our Communities.**

Health

My Government will continue to accord priority to improving our health care system in order to meet the health care needs of all Grenadians. My Government will also intensify actions to promote healthy lifestyles and preventive healthcare with the aim of tackling the effects of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which create a burden for both individuals and the healthcare system. Significant progress is being made with the National Health Insurance, which is helping my Government accelerate the implementation process.

Priority will also be given to upgrading health facilities with the aim of improving the delivery of public health services and health outcomes in general. Special attention will also be paid to integrating climate change considerations into health policies and interventions and heightening public awareness of the link between climate change and human health.

Education

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

My Government will continue to make every effort to strengthen the management and leadership of the Ministry of Education. Emphasis will also be placed on continuing to build the capacity of our educators to improve the functioning of the education sector and its education outcomes, from early childhood through the tertiary level.

An all-out effort will be made to create higher education opportunities by providing scholarships, supporting the systems and institutions that foster the development of critical skills and offering the relevant training needed to effectively navigate life and work in the 21st century. Emphasis will also be placed on increasing the use of technology at all levels of the education system, and on upgrading educational facilities across our tri-island state. Indeed, my Government is well on the way to providing all public schools with Wi-Fi connectivity through the Caribbean Regional Communications Infrastructure Programme (CARCIP) project, which also involves two other regional countries.

Youth

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

My Government will continue to prioritise programmes aimed at empowering young people and creating employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for them in order to reduce the number of at-risk youth. Preparations are well underway for the celebration of Youth Week later this month and we expect to engage thousands of our youth, involving them in various activities during that period.

Through well-established programmes such as *ASPIRE, PROJECT REACH, PROJECT FLY, M-POWER, YUTBIZ* and *IMANI*, my Government continues to create pathways and opportunities for young people to realise their full potential. These programmes are helping large numbers of young people achieve Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) in such areas as food and beverage and commercial food preparation, as well as provide skills training in general construction, the hospitality industry, small business development and management. Many successful participants have also secured start-up grants for their business operations.

Additionally, my Government will focus on developing a more coordinated approach among the many programmes and agencies that deal with youth development and empowerment issues. This, we anticipate, will help improve

results and achieve the maximum impact from these important programmes and interventions.

My Government is also preparing the next generation of parliamentarians. This year, the Parish and National Youth Parliaments were re-established, providing an opportunity for more than two hundred young people to be trained in parliamentary procedures, with thirty of them participating in the first and second sitting of the National Youth Parliament.

Sports

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

It is well known that sports provide a safe space for children and young people, and promote community development, support healthy lifestyles and generate economic activity. Priority will therefore be given to the implementation of the National Sports Policy in the coming year. Additionally, my Government will continue to focus on strengthening the institutional structures for the development of sports and on upgrading sporting facilities across our tri-island state.

Vulnerable Persons

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

With the establishment of the Special Victims Unit and Hotline, significant progress is being made with the investigation and prosecution of various sexual crimes, and cases of domestic violence and child abuse. My Government will continue to devote attention to strengthening our child protection systems and institutions and to significantly reducing the number of children and youth who suffer from various forms of physical and mental abuse and emotional trauma. The Home for Girls, which will be opened before the end of 2019, will represent a major step forward in the provision of institutional support to protect our young girls.

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

My Government will also accord priority to enhancing the delivery of programmes geared towards improving elderly care. The geriatric programmes that are currently being executed, will be assessed with a view to strengthening their effectiveness and impact.

Ensuring that our elderly enjoy a decent standard of living is also of great importance to my Government. As such, my Government will soon commence payments to retirees who were appointed to an established post in the Public Service after February 22, 1985; retired at the age of 60 and provided a minimum of twenty-six and two-thirds years of public service on a permanent and continuous basis. The payments will be considered an advance on any sum payable once a definitive position on pension is determined. My Government remains firmly committed to settlement of the pending pension and gratuity issues.

My Government will also place greater emphasis on strengthening the institutions and agencies that provide support services to other vulnerable groups in society, such as persons with disabilities.

Gender

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

Gender mainstreaming, gender equality, and the social and economic empowerment of women and girls are key priorities of my Government. Last year, Grenada ratified the International Labour Organisation's Convention 189 on the Rights of Domestic Workers, which paves the way to improve conditions for workers in the domestic and paid care sector, who are predominantly women. My Government will also continue to focus on addressing the social and economic factors that give rise to gender disparities.

Housing

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

My Government is strongly committed to addressing the ever-increasing demand for safe and affordable housing. Work is progressing well on the housing projects in the parishes of St. Mark, St. David, St. Patrick, and St. George and in Carriacou. Housing Brigades are also continuing their important work of repairing, constructing and rebuilding houses for vulnerable citizens across our tri-island

state. Next year, work will commence on the St. John housing project. Additionally, plans are underway for private-sector led middle-income housing. In fact, my Government is currently holding discussions with a private developer. My Government will also pay special attention to heightening awareness of the need to incorporate environmental and climate considerations into housing construction. In providing affordable housing solutions, the ultimate aim of my Government is to build strong homes and, by extension, strong families and communities.

Culture

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

One of Grenada's attributes is its rich culture and heritage. 2019 was a particularly successful year in this regard, with several of our artistes advancing to the finals of the International Soca Monarch in neighbouring Trinidad and Tobago and masterfully showcasing their individual talent at the event. Furthermore, with the crowning of Mr. Killa as the International Soca Monarch, Grenada has made a bold statement on the global stage about the maturity of our island's soca. A number of artistes have also taken the flag of Grenada to countries around the world where, from a musical standpoint, Grenada had no prior visibility. We are indeed proud of our artistes and their stellar accomplishments.

The vibrancy of our country's culture was also on display at CARIFESTA XIV in Trinidad and once again, as the 120 participants made it known through song,

dance and other artforms, Grenada's rich traditions and heritage remain alive and well. These successes underscore the need for my Government to provide the enabling support that will harness our cultural and creative talent and preserve our rich culture. In 2020, greater emphasis will be placed on strengthening our cultural and creative industries. My Government also intends to identify a greater number of cultural ambassadors who can promote Grenada's culture at home and abroad.

Labour

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

Enabling the creation of sustainable jobs and providing opportunities to promote entrepreneurship continue to be strategic priorities for my Government. Last year, a total of 155 workers were placed in employment overseas through the Ministry of Labour. Additionally, 147 IMANIs found permanent employment in the private sector. Overall, unemployment in our country is steadily declining, which is most welcome. My Government will continue to provide an enabling environment that facilitates continued reduction in unemployment, especially among our young people.

The vibrancy of the construction sector continues. A number of projects are already on stream or in the offing, particularly in the student housing and general accommodation sector. These projects not only demonstrate the growth and development of the country; they also have a positive impact on employment, particularly on the construction, culinary arts and services sectors.

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

An important issue facing us as a nation is the changing nature of traditional modes of work and employment. Indeed, rapid technological advances have profound implications for the workplace, the workforce, the nature of work itself, skills, and wages. Cognizant of the 21st century realities, my Government will initiate discussions with the social partners on the changing nature of work and on how we can collectively prepare for the changes that are occurring with lightning speed.

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

The second thematic area deals with **Growing our Economy**.

Agriculture

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

There are three ongoing projects— *the Climate-smart Agricultural and Rural Enterprise Development Project (known as SAEP), the Youth in Agriculture Project, and the Regional Agricultural Competitiveness Project (AGRICOM)*, which are aimed at increasing youth participation in agriculture, boosting agricultural production and, by extension, creating jobs and improving livelihoods, especially in rural communities.

My Government will continue to focus on expanding youth involvement in the sector, building the capacity of farmers and workers in the sector, improving agricultural production and productivity through the use of technology, increasing the value added of agricultural products and bolstering the sector's resilience to climate change. Great emphasis will also be placed on strengthening the linkages between agriculture and other sectors, in particular tourism and manufacturing, and on improving food security and the nutritional content of the foods we consume.

Tourism

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

My Government will continue to focus on developing the tourism sector by tapping into new destinations, upgrading sites and attractions, training and certifying more industry workers, supporting more entrepreneurs in the sector, and facilitating the integration of technology into our tourism products and services. Young people in particular will be afforded the opportunity to receive training and acquire skills through the recently-launched Hospitality and Tourism Department at the T.A. Marryshow Community College, which seeks to enhance the quality of our human resources in the tourism sector and, by extension, the tourism experience offered by our country.

My Government recognises the growing importance of heritage-based tourism and the attendant need to ensure sustainable development. Recognising also the need

for a multi-ministry approach, we will move aggressively to develop tourism sites in order to improve our tourism product and offer visitors an enhanced experience in Pure Grenada, while at the same time ensuring that we preserve our pristine environment. An assessment of the heritage sites including forts, aqueducts and windmills will be conducted soon by consultants from Cuba. Additionally, we will host a team of experts from Jamaica's community tourism initiative.

In the coming year, my Government will also focus on supporting the mainstreaming of sustainability practices throughout the tourism sector, with a view to striking an appropriate balance between social, economic and environmental issues, as well as promoting greater involvement of our local communities in the sector so as to create jobs and improve livelihoods in villages across our country. Strengthening linkages between tourism and other sectors such as agriculture, health, culture and sports continues to be a strategic priority of my Government.

Enabling access to funds for sectoral improvement is another strategic priority of my Government. In the 2019 budget, we allocated three million dollars to be used as a soft loan facility, provided by the Grenada Development Bank to small hoteliers. We are pressing ahead with the promotion of this facility and working more closely with indigenous hoteliers to ensure that they take full advantage of this loan facility to upgrade their facilities and increase their competitiveness.

The Business Environment

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

Improving the environment for large, medium-sized, and small businesses to thrive and prosper remains a key priority of my Government. Through the ongoing implementation of the National Export Strategy launched in 2017, the development of businesses in the services sector is coming into sharper focus. The strategic aim of this effort is to boost the exportation of other services so as to complement the main service-related exports, namely tourism and educational services.

In the coming fiscal year, my Government will intensify efforts geared towards improving the Government-to-Business interface through greater use of digital technologies. In this regard, a concessional loan from the World Bank was recently approved to implement the *Digitisation for Resilient Government Project*, with the objectives of developing an enabling environment to modernise the delivery of public services and leveraging digital technologies to provide select public services.

Furthermore, greater attention will also be paid to creating an investment-friendly environment conducive to both local and foreign businesses in areas that can contribute to economic diversification and transformation. Promoting increased value-added of our local products and exports as well as strengthening support services especially to small businesses and young entrepreneurs will also be areas of focus.

My Government will also step up the pace of ongoing initiatives aimed at taking full advantage of new economic opportunities that utilise our country's natural resources, such as renewable energy, hydrocarbons, our ocean space and our cultural assets. My Government also attaches great importance to expanding training programmes in order to ensure that Grenadians, especially our young people, possess the requisite skills for employment in the new and emerging economic sectors.

My Government remains fully committed to the Climate-Smart Agriculture and Rural Enterprise Development Programme (SAEP), which is intended to help reduce poverty and improve rural development in Grenada. Through this \$38 million project, Government is providing capacity-building support, technical services and financing for rural businesses and is also helping farmers improve environmental sustainability by adopting climate-smart agricultural practices.

Infrastructure

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

Well-developed infrastructure is critical to support economic growth and development. In 2018, significant investment was made in upgrading the water supply infrastructure in our country. My Government will continue to invest in climate-resilient infrastructure and, in this regard, will forge ahead with activities to advance the development of the *Climate-Smart Cities Project* that is being funded with grants from the Green Climate Fund.

My Government will also step up efforts to improve the transportation infrastructure by focusing on traffic congestion and road safety. A Transport Board is already operational, with a mandate to deal with these and other matters. Infrastructural upgrades will also continue at both the Maurice Bishop International Airport and the Lauriston Airport. Attention will also be devoted to continuing work aimed at improving physical planning to support Grenada's sustainable development priorities.

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

I will now turn to the third aspect of the Theme – **Protecting Our Environment.**

My Government will continue to take active measures to protect and preserve our natural environment. In the coming year, my Government will focus greater attention on building awareness of the urgent environmental issues to be addressed now and in the years ahead. It is most disturbing that some of our people are still engaging in environmentally harmful practices such as the indiscriminate burning of bush, inadequate energy conservation, water wastage and careless littering such as throwing garbage out of vehicles. Environmental experts are now talking more about climate crisis than climate change, and we must all do our part to protect our environment, as the climate crisis the world now faces poses a much greater existential threat to small-island states such as ours. With this in mind, my Government will step up public education campaigns to highlight the importance and necessity of sound environmental practices.

Efforts to strengthen Grenada's resilience-planning and resilience-building agendas will be tackled with a renewed sense of urgency. In keeping with the Non-Biodegradable Waste Control Act, my Government has successfully implemented the ban on Styrofoam material. Our attention is now focused on the ban on single-use plastics as part of the overall effort to ensure that we engage in sustainable waste management. We are cognisant of the need to protect and preserve the environment while at the same time minimising the impact on businesses and consumers.

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

In July last year, Cabinet approved the implementation of the Caribbean Oceans and Aquaculture Sustainability Facility (COAST), which offers parametric insurance for the fishing industry in Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique. The COAST facility will provide coverage to enable fisher folk to recover quickly after weather-related events and, in so doing, will ultimately protect the food security of fisher folk and promote sustainable livelihoods in the fishing sector.

In January of this year, a Climate Change Policy Assessment was conducted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which provided concrete recommendations to strengthen efforts to build resilience to climate change. In addition, only last month the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Bill was debated in the Honourable Houses of Parliament. This bill is aimed at strengthening the legislative framework for integrated coastal zone management and protection in Grenada.

Strengthening disaster preparedness and management will also be a top priority. A disaster risk financing strategy is currently being developed with technical assistance from the World Bank. Indeed, disaster risk financing is a key component of comprehensive disaster risk management.

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

My Government will also continue to advocate more forcefully in the international arena for greater financial and technical support for resilience building in Grenada and other Small Island Developing States. Although our contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions is miniscule, we are disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change. My Government will also continue to demand a fairer and more morally just global system in which the countries that contribute the most to climate change do more to help those countries that are least responsible for this disruptive phenomenon.

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

I now turn to the final aspect of the Theme – **Strengthening Institutions**

Governance in the Public Sector

Improving transparency and accountability across the public sector are of paramount concern to my Government. We will put stronger measures in place to

curb practices that fail to promote personal and professional ethics. In the coming year, public procurement systems will be bolstered through stricter controls and monitoring. Additionally, my Government will be undertaking a public expenditure review with the aim of taking concrete actions to strengthen expenditure controls as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of public spending and the institutional mechanisms for expenditure management.

Institutions such as the Integrity Commission, the Office of the Ombudsman and the Public Accounts Committee will continue to carry out their important mandates, thereby contributing to the promotion of high ethical standards and good governance in the public sector.

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

It is important to stress that good governance, which essentially deals with rules of behaviour, applies to all institutions across our country, not only to the public sector.

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

Strengthening national security to address new and emerging security risks and threats and, by extension, provide a safe and secure environment for citizens and visitors alike, remains a top priority of my Government. Likewise, institutional strengthening of Her Majesty's prisons to address such pressing issues as high rates

of recidivism, capacity constraints, as well as overcrowding remains an important item on my Government's agenda.

The Ministry of Legal Affairs will be strengthened so that it is able to adequately focus on national priorities, in keeping with Government's legislative agenda. Moreover, my Government will continue to make investments to upgrade court infrastructure, as well as to support the use of modern court technologies to increase efficiency.

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

My Government remains committed to strategic engagement at the bilateral, regional and international levels, as well as with the Grenadian Diaspora. My Government is closely monitoring developments in the United Kingdom as it prepares to leave the European Union. Indeed, together with other CARICOM countries as well as the Dominican Republic, Grenada is taking proactive measures aimed at the conclusion of an Economic Partnership Agreement with the United Kingdom that is similar to the current agreement with the European Union, in an effort to maintain preferential terms for trade in goods and services.

Conclusion

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

I have set out my Government's strategic priorities for this Third Session of the Tenth Parliament, the details of which will be fleshed out in the 2020 Budget Statement, which will be delivered before the end of the 2019 fiscal year.

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

It is important to emphasise that the Throne Speech is not merely a traditional practice. It plays an extremely important role in setting the legislative agenda for the Parliament, the policy agenda for the Executive, and the general direction for the Government.

As my Government moves forward with its strategic agenda for nation building, it will do so in partnership with other stakeholders in the development process, including the private sector, civil society, trade unions, churches, youth and non-governmental organisations. My Government is fully cognisant of the fact that there must be collective responsibility for, as well as shared commitment to, advancing Grenada's sustainable development agenda.

The Holy Scripture of Genesis, chapter twelve, verse two states and I quote: ***“And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”***

Let us therefore move forward together as the great nation that we are, towards the realisation of Vision 2035, with collective confidence and strength, confronting our challenges and seizing our opportunities.

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. And may He continue to richly bless this great nation of ours.