

THRONE SPEECH 2008

A Better Grenada for All

Delivered to the Houses of Parliament

By



His Excellency Sir Daniel Williams, Governor-General
On the occasion of the First Session of the Eighth Parliament

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, Members of Parliament

Our Nation embarks upon this First Session of the Eight Parliament in challenging but optimistic circumstances.

The people of this Country have spoken.

They voted for the restoration of integrity, hope and a brighter tomorrow.

The benefits which the institution of Parliament promises to the people will best be delivered if members of Parliament are mindful that the sovereignty of Parliament and its immense power derive from one source, the legitimate will of the people.

It is to the people, that the duty to uphold the honour and dignity of the Nation is owed.

It is to the enduring good of the people, that elected and nominated representatives in Parliament, must commit themselves, in order to realize the patriotic dreams so powerfully enshrined in our National Anthem.

Ultimately, it is to the Glory of God Almighty that the work of this Parliament must be dedicated.

My Government, having been recently elected into office, with a strong mandate to govern Grenada, is determined through this Parliament, to transform the social and economic landscape of our beloved country.

An important task is to enlarge our democracy by delivering new and concrete benefits to the people. Indeed, My Government's programmes will ensure that every citizen develops a sense of commitment and a spirit of sacrifice towards making Grenada better.

In pursuit of these high ideals, my Government is cognizant of the democratic and strategic significance of partnership. In this regard, my Government will work assiduously to build a strong and meaningful partnership between Government, the Private Sector, the Trade Unions and other representatives of civil society.

My Government intends to lay out a strong legislative agenda designed to anchor our advancement in the rule of law.

The legal framework will be provided for the several transformation initiatives, which will underpin the economic and social welfare of all Grenadians.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker,

My Government's priorities in this Eight Parliament will be: good governance, reducing cost of living, stronger economic management; improving the business climate; better health care, stimulating agriculture and improving food security; better education and human resource development, stronger environmental management, youth empowerment and development of our culture.

Good governance is universally accepted as a precondition for development. Its principles include accountability, transparency, people's participation, equity and inclusion and the rule of law.

In pursuit of good governance, my Government will move swiftly to establish the following:

1. The Integrity Commission to ensure integrity in public life. This Commission will obtain declaration of the assets, liabilities and income of persons in public life;
2. The Public Procurement Authority to regulate and harmonize public procurement practices in the Public Service. This will reduce the scope for corruption and ensure value for money of public expenditure;
3. An Investment Policy Review Committee to review all major investment proposals (local and foreign) before they are considered by Cabinet;
4. The National Economic Council to consider and advise Government on macro-economic policies and other major issues that are impacting or may impact the Grenadian economy; and
5. The Ombudsman who shall have the power to investigate the administrative actions taken by on behalf of Government and other public authorities including statutory bodies.

My Government's legislative programme will include, but not limited to the following:

1. Arrangements for the establishment of the Council for Carriacou and Petite Martinique;
2. An independent body to manage scholarships and training awards which will enable aggrieved applicants to seek judicial review by the courts, while ensuring that there will be no politics in scholarships;
3. A Social Development Agency to spearhead necessary social development initiatives and to achieve greater efficiencies in the delivery of services to vulnerable groups in the society;
4. The development of a Family Court;
5. Amendments to legislation designed to strengthen regimes dealing with violence against women, child abuse and other social crimes;
6. A new Investment Code;
7. Repeal of the National Reconstruction Levy; and
8. Freedom of Information legislation.

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Madam President, Mr. Speaker

My Government will demonstrate a strong level of commitment to Youth empowerment to secure a solid foundation for a brighter tomorrow.

It is my Government's conviction that "Every youth has value, every youth must contribute and every youth can earn".

The valued goals of youth empowerment will be achieved through the implementation of the following programmes, among others:

1. Community-based master craft shops as youth value centers for multiple skills training
2. A National Music project
3. Small business orientation and enterprise development training
4. "Youth High-Tec" advanced overseas training programme
5. Niche (high value) farming
6. Counselling and social outreach training.

THE NEW ECONOMY

My Government intends to build a New Economy in Grenada. A modern economy is one, which answers to the needs of our people, including today's youth and succeeding generations.

We are at a juncture in our development when new opportunities for economic growth and wealth creation must be found and pursued resolutely.

My Government will take bold steps towards oil and gas exploration, new food production methods and techniques, fashion designing, cultural products for tourism, ICT services and ICT-enabled products, among others.

PRIVATE SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

My Government firmly believes that the private sector is the engine of growth. In this regard, my Government is committed to providing the enabling environment for the private sector to thrive thereby creating meaningful jobs for our people.

In this regard, my Government will soon establish an Office of Private Sector Development in the Ministry of Finance to manage private sector relations and deliver on key reforms such as the new Investment Code, a Small Business Policy and faster transaction times for processing the private sector's business with Government.

With these arrangements, my Government aims to present a fair, transparent, predictable and efficient fiscal path for businesses to run on.

ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT

My Government is committed to the sound economic management of our Country's limited financial resources. In this regard, my Government will pursue disciplined fiscal policy and will ensure successful completion of the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility with the International Monetary Fund.

My Government will implement tax reforms to modernize tax policy and administration in an effort to maximize government revenue.

My Government will also move swiftly to reduce government expenditure by cutting out waste. In this regard, a Waste Reduction Unit will be established to deliver on this commitment.

The details of my Government's macro-economic and fiscal policies will be presented in the 2009 Budget.

TOURISM

Madam President, Mr. Speaker,

The economic prospects for Grenada in the foreseeable future will be heavily influenced by developments in the tourism sector. My Government welcomes the new investments on the way or otherwise imminent and believes that these projects will enjoy even greater success under the current Administration. At the same time, Government encourages the local tourism private sector to continue to participate in the development of the sector on the basis of innovation and investment in quality products for a highly competitive market.

My Government is aware that of the relationship between quality and costs and is prepared to examine ways by which costs in the sector could be lowered as one element in improving competitiveness. Our training initiatives will have a similar impact.

Very importantly, my Government will invest heavily in product development as well as destination marketing. In addition, my Government will provide opportunities for new and small businesses to bring onto the market fresh tourism products. Our objectives are to earn more from tourism and to secure more employment for our people.

The critical importance of the sector requires that optimal arrangements be put in place on the public sector side for policy development and management.

My Government intends to establish a Tourism Authority dedicated specifically at pursuing the business interests and goals of the sector and negotiating with the key players in the trade. Separate arrangements will be made for product development, customer services and related ancillary services.

Our focus in the medium term would be to establish Grenada as the Dive Capital of the Eastern Caribbean, and to position Grenada as a preferred cruise destination.

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

Madam President, Mr. Speaker

Public policy in this crucial area of the national economy will be based on achieving a number of macro-economic goals, particularly with respect to employment, incomes and foreign exchange earnings. It is evident that bananas will not be a main area of focus, but emphasis will be placed on nutmegs and cocoa, as traditional crops having major marketing possibilities. Efforts will also be made to achieve some level of processing and value-added using these as raw materials.

There are strong prospects for chocolate and confectionery production and the private sector will be incentivised to pursue these. Government is also committed to raising the volume and consistency of fruit and vegetable production in order to achieve the pre-requisites for a viable agro-processing enterprise.

In this period, it is important that agricultural production addresses the food security needs of the population and that such produce can be brought to market at competitive prices.

Given the present state of the sector, it is clear that Government will have to seek international assistance for technical and technology inputs, pest and disease control, new production systems; as well as trade and marketing.

In addition, a set of support services will be required, ranging from Extension Knowledge Transfer, to feeder and farm roads and training of a new generation of farmers. In this latter respect, the Mirabeau facility will be the center for agricultural modernization.

The fishing sub-sector has shown clear signs of financial viability both domestically and through exports. Government will ensure that fishermen have adequate facilities and that they are supported by the necessary search and rescue services

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Madam President, Mr. Speaker

My Government is convinced that Grenada will not become a better and more prosperous country unless fundamental improvements are effected in the area of human resource development (HRD).

Indeed, the time has come for us to invest heavily in HRD even as we seek international and other support to train our people.

My Government proposes to allocate significant sums annually from domestic resources towards this cause. The technical and administrative capability throughout the Public Service must be strengthened and we must train for the needs of the private sector. There is no alternative. Failure to move in this direction as rapidly as possible would spell disaster for our Nation.

My Government intends to elaborate a package of fiscal incentives to encourage the private sector to establish a credible fund for HRD purposes.

HEALTH

Madam President, Mr. Speaker

My Government maintains that good health is a basic human right. The standard of health care enjoyed by the citizens of Grenada will not only be an indicator of the quality of life, but will also be a conduit for economic growth and social development.

My Government intends to strengthen the health care infrastructure and to secure adequate levels of technical and professional services for the sector. The area of health is one that must be addressed on a nation-wide basis, with the objective of bringing the services as closely as possible to people in their communities. In this regard, significant upgrades will be effected at the Princess Alice and Princess Royal Hospitals. Major emphasis will be placed on Preventative, Curative and Rehabilitative Health Services through a series of reforms that will be undertaken, commencing immediately. My Government intends to introduce two special programmes namely; School Health Care Programme and Free Health care for the elderly poor and children less than 18 years of age.

SPORTS

Madam President, Mr. Speaker

My Government recognizes sports as a big contributor to the health, fitness and productivity of the society. Accordingly, a well-balanced sports programme designed to achieve a number of objectives will be introduced through the school system and community organizations.

Apart from the supply of sporting infrastructure, Government will pay careful attention to the management arrangements for sports such that a degree of professionalism is achieved.

Young people in particular, can benefit from institutional strengthening for the delivery of quality sports. The period ahead will therefore see significant changes in the administration of sports in Grenada as well as in the treatment of our national players in the various sporting disciplines. The establishment of National Sports Council will play a pivotal role in securing the changes that are necessary. Grenada has considerable sporting resources and every effort will be made to package these into a viable sports tourism product.

ENERGY

My Government regards the development of our energy resources as essential for the transformation of Grenada's economic and social landscape. In this regard, my Government's first task will be to develop and articulate an energy policy covering both traditional and renewable forms of energy.

The second task will be to establish a National Energy Commission, whose mandate shall be to guide the implementation of that policy. My Government will also seek to promptly resume negotiations with the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela with a view to resolving our maritime boundaries.

THE ENVIRONMENT

My Government is cognizant of the inherent tension between the natural and the built environment.

The policy of my Government will be the preservation of the natural environment. We have been bequeathed a healthy environment and we have a duty to pass on to the next generation an unspoilt natural habitat. In addition, my Government intends to promote Grenada as an eco-tourism destination.

In this context, my Government shall maintain a balance between our natural forest and aquatic resources and the major investments to advance our economic development.

CULTURE

My Government believes that culture is the bedrock of national pride and patriotism. It is the most authentic statement of the way of life of the Grenadian people and a key distinguishing feature of our Nation in the international marketplace.

For these reasons, my Government will give full attention and adequate resources to the role and place of Culture on the national development agenda. These will include: the development of a cultural policy, the establishment of a National Cultural Centre, the establishment of a carnival promotion agency; the development of a national music project; and the establishment of a School of Culture at the T.A. Marryshow Community College.

FOREIGN POLICY

Madam President, Mr. Speaker

The current international and regional circumstances require that Grenada pursue a foreign policy that is designed to not only achieve meaningful integration in world affairs but more importantly, to negotiate access to resources for our economic and social development programmes.

Grenada's national interests must be defined in the clearest possible terms and in ways which establish a preferred route towards national development.

In this regard, the cultivation and maintenance of friendly relations both at the bilateral and multilateral levels will enjoy priority.

My Government values most highly its bilateral relations with the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and other Caricom countries, as well as with the People's Republic of China, the European Union, Canada, the United Kingdom, Canada, USA, Cuba and Venezuela.

Relations with India, Brazil, Singapore, Japan, South Korea, South Africa and other countries will be purposefully deepened in the years ahead.

My Government intends to maintain proper representation and to participate fully in the major multilateral organizations, especially the United Nations, the Organization of American States, Caricom and the OECS.

REGIONAL INTEGRATION

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker

We live in very challenging economic times with many uncertainties in the global economy.

My Government regards regional integration as an imperative for small states such as Grenada. In this regard, strong support will be given to advancing the OECS Economic Union, the CARICOM Single Market and Economy and other regional arrangements that will redound to the benefit of our people.

CARRIACOU AND PETITE MARTINIQUE AFFAIRS

Madam President, Mr. Speaker

Very soon, the sister isles will be afforded due constitutional respect. My Government is working to establish the Council for Carriacou and Petite Martinique. The practice of democracy in the sister isles must be elevated from "after thought" to an integral part of our Nation.

My Government views the building of an economy on Carriacou as an urgent priority. Citizens who live on those isles must have the opportunity to secure real jobs and to earn a decent livelihood. This can be achieved if locals invest in the growth industries, while Government looks after infrastructural development and the revitalization of the agriculture industry.

CRIME AND NATIONAL SECURITY

My Government accepts that it has primary responsibility for the security status of the country. It is an especially important area of public policy because the environment for economic and social development will be compromised if we do not put in place the best possible arrangements to look after the security needs of citizens, businesses and investors.

My Government shall strengthen the Royal Grenada Police Force and ensure that the Police are able to exercise their powers according to the laws of the land. Special assistance will be sought from friendly Governments with developed and professional police services.

GRENADIANS RESIDING ABROAD

Madam President, Mr. Speaker

Clearly, it is to the good of Grenada that thousands of our nationals live and work overseas. Over the years, they have contributed heavily to the economic and social welfare of Grenada by regular and consistent remittances to their families and relatives. They have also given of their technical knowledge and experience, not to mention their fund-raising efforts for various humanitarian causes.

In response, My Government proposes to embrace fully our nationals overseas and to provide them with quality consular services. We intend also to explore ways of ensuring that they continue to contribute towards the growth of our democracy.

CONCLUSION

Madam President, Mr. Speaker

My Government has outlined a very ambitious programme consisting of a legislative agenda and specific sectoral policies. Success in realizing these goals will be driven by a sense of duty to serve all the people of Grenada.

My Government is satisfied that standing on a strong platform of good governance and respect for the democratic institutions of our country will root our society in the traditional values of patriotism, sharing, equality and fairness.

My Government's programme of national development is set to guarantee personal prosperity, social harmony, reduced poverty and peace and security.

The work of this Parliament will be truly historic if only because it marks a new direction and purpose for our beloved Nation.

May God bless the people of our Country!