



Address by Prime Minister Hon. Tillman Thomas

at the ceremony marking Grenada's 35th Anniversary of Independence

7 February 2009

Fellow Grenadians, As we observe the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Independence of our nation, I have chosen to focus on the above two lines of our National Anthem, which since 1974, have remained the embodiment of our hopes and aspirations from the first time that there have been a people who have dared to call themselves 'Grenadian'.

I also wish to share with you the fact that our history is long, proud and distinguished. Importantly, I think that we need to draw upon the lessons of our glorious past moments in order to chart our course in the immediate and distant future.

Thirty-five years in the life of an independent nation-state is not a very long time. For those of us who are old enough to remember, we were the first in the Eastern Caribbean to attain independence on February 7, 1974.

Grenada was born in controversy.

Independence was a prelude to events five years later, when in 1979 Grenada entered areas of political experience hitherto unprecedented in the history of the Anglophone Caribbean. From the years immediately before independence to the events of late 1983, Grenada had experienced a decade of political turbulence, from which we as a nation are only recently just emerging.

For those of us who have some knowledge of our country's history, such experiences since 1973 are, to a great extent, nothing new. From the start of the European presence in the Caribbean, Grenada showed that it was always prepared to be in the forefront of the great issues of the day.

Most of the great struggles that have attracted the attention of people in the region and beyond since 1492 have been played out in Grenada.

Grenada's indigenous peoples challenged the European invaders head on, and, choosing death to slavery, threw themselves over the cliffs at what is called Leapers hill in Sauteurs.

The heroic resistance shown by these early Grenadian was not to be forgotten. It set the stage for a people who were intolerant of arbitrary and tyrannical rule from their leaders.

As time wore on, and the institutions of chattel slavery and colonial rule became entrenched, the people of Grenada often rose in revolt to challenge the order. Fedon's rebellion is one of the most notorious.

Similarly, over the years, our country has given to the world many of the region's most famous personalities. One such son was Tubal Uriah Buz Butler. After World War I, he went to Trinidad and Tobago, where he also became involved in the politics of that country.

He was foremost in the field of organised labour, particularly in the heartland of Trinidad's oil exploration and refining industry. Butler was, in many ways, the political midwife of modern contemporary Trinidad and Tobago.

We are more familiar with Theophilus Albert Marryshow born in 1897, the same year as Marcus Garvey. He began his professional career as a printer, and came under the influence of William Galway Donavon, one of the foremost political activists of the early twentieth century.

He established "The West Indian" newspaper, where he used its pages to advance his favourite causes: self-government for the British West Indies and Federation.

Marryshow became a member of the first and only British West Indies Federal Parliament, which was inaugurated in April 1958. Today, Marryshow's ideas are still relevant, as we continue to find ways to bring about the integration that is the best means by which the peoples of our region can find their just place in the world.

Grenada also gave to the United States one of her most famous figures. Louise Norton, migrated to the United States from Grenada, where she married Earl Little, a American Baptist preacher and staunch follower of the Jamaican visionary Marcus Garvey. Her son, Malcolm Little, became known as Malcolm X, or later, El Malik Al Shabazz.

In 1970, our own Jennifer Hosten became the first non-white Miss World in the history of the competition, paving the way for similar winners from the Caribbean.

Grenada continued its ground breaking ways.

With the swearing-in of Dame Hilda Bynoe as Governor of Grenada, history was made. She was not only the first native Governor and the first and only female Governor of Grenada to date, but she also became the first female Governor in the history of the entire British Commonwealth.

Similarly, Grenada was the first island nation to host an OAS General Assembly meeting in 1977 and Expo 69.

In the sporting arena, we have had many successes particularly in recent times. Sports persons such as Junior Murray, Rawl Lewis, Devon Smith, Andre Fletcher, Afi Fletcher, Debbie-Ann Lewis, Shalrie Joseph, Jason Roberts, Anthony Modeste, Alleyne Francique, Randy Lewis, Sherry Fletcher, Hazel-ann Regis, Neisha Bernard, Kirani James and many others, have made us proud.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate them.

The period 1973 to 1983 was a turbulent decade for Grenada. We were forced to confront the realities of our independence that was won in 1974.

The experiences of 1979 to 1983 may have ended in tragedy, but we have emerged from it into a period of relative peace in our political affairs, which has persisted into the present time.

Our people have shown a resilience that is almost unmatched in the annals of the Caribbean.

We quickly rebuilt our economies and societies out of the ruins of 1796 and 1983.

We have emerged from the political turmoil of 1795-96, in 1951, and, more recently, 1983.

We rose from the destruction of "Hurricane Janet" in 1955, and rebuilt our country.

We have risen from the destruction of recent major natural disasters as "Ivan" and "Emily" and emerged stronger.

It was only a few months ago, through the democratic process that we managed to change our government, which had held the reins of power for nearly a decade and a half, in a manner that was lively, exciting, yet peacefully.

The foregoing outline of the major episodes in our nation's history shows that Grenada has, among other things a long, interesting and proud history, where all of the major issues of the last five centuries have been fought out within our territorial boundaries.

They form part of our heritage, and give meaning to the words of our national anthem:

“Ever conscious of God, being proud of our heritage

May we with faith and courage, aspire, build, advance”

Our people, over the centuries, have shown the courage to boldly challenge the order that threatened to reduce them to the status of hewers of wood and drawers of water.

We challenged the international established order on such issues as slavery, colonial rule, and national sovereignty.

That is why I am confident that as a people we can confront the many challenges that lie ahead.

Ladies and gentlemen, the current world economic crisis is real. We have seen a slowdown in economic growth, a food crisis, a fuel crisis and now a major financial crisis.

A fundamental contributor to this financial crisis is the lack of regulatory oversight and poor governance.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have repeatedly indicated that good governance is a pre-condition for economic and social development. Good governance demands transparency, accountability, respect for law and order, honesty and humility.

I want to reconfirm to you that this is the hallmark of our administration.

It is the only way that we as a people can restore our integrity, renew our hope and build Grenada together.

No country, no economic sector is immune. Everyone is taking stock. So far every Caribbean country is experiencing economic downturns and job losses.

Tourism arrivals are down, real estate and construction activities have slowed as well as private sector investment.

Domestic credit is expected to tighten as institutions become more prudent and cautious.

What is unnerving is the fact that it is extremely difficult to predict and plan given the high degree of economic uncertainty.

Given this scenario, the question that needs to be answered is what do we do as a country?

I say to you that we need to prepare and brace ourselves.

Clearly, everyone needs to first fully understand and appreciate the severity of this crisis.

Importantly, we need to make the appropriate adjustments and to take responsibility for our future.

We must make sacrifices and become more creative.

We must become more productive and conscientious about our work ethic.

We must produce more of what we need and utilize more of what we produce.

We need to reduce waste and become more efficient.

We must become more careful with our spending.

We need to consolidate our modest gains and to build a robust, diversified, sustainable and strong economy.

We need specifically to focus on building our productive capacity in Agriculture, Fisheries and Tourism to consolidate our core competence and competitive edge.

A few weeks ago, all the OECS heads and the Ministers of Finance met in St Kitts to discuss and strategize on how we can deal with this crisis. We concluded and reaffirmed the necessity to continue the deepening of our integration process. This we see as critical if we are to effectively cater to the needs of our people.

We agreed that we will seek to stimulate the tourism, fishing and constructions sectors as a matter of priority. These are identified areas that can generate additional employment and economic activity in the sub region.

In the case of Agriculture, my government is pursuing many initiatives designed to increase food production and security. Over the ensuing weeks you will be informed about specific initiatives.

Our education and training programme for our young people has already commenced. This programme will equip and empower them to enter the work place, to become more productive and to build confidence in themselves. I firmly believe in the old Chinese proverb that says:

“Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a life time”.

We intend to equip our young people for a lifetime.

As the crisis deepens, we are mindful of the possible impact of the down turn on the most vulnerable among us. That is why we are currently auditing all programmes to ensure that the process is efficient and waste is eliminated.

As we look forward to the next thirty five years, there will be many more challenges.

The challenges of rebuilding our institutions, of renewing hope in our abilities and capabilities, of inculcating our tried and tested values, of addressing our social and economic issues, of creating a competitive country and delivering benefits to all Grenadians, are all pertinent.

Therefore, we must resolve to work assiduously to address these issues in a timely manner.

This challenge requires that all stakeholders, the government, the private sector, the labour unions, the NGOs, the churches and all other parties work together in unison to achieve a better Grenada.

If ever there is a time for national unity, NOW IS THE TIME.

Together we can surmount all challenges.

We are a unique people with a special history.

Confident in understanding and knowing who we are, we will continue to aspire, build and advance as one people.

Inspired with hope, with fortitude and strength we will advance as one people.

As we celebrate, I urge you to remain steadfast in the pursuance of our dreams and aspirations to make Grenada a better place for all.

May god bless Grenada.

Consistent with our theme, I now wish to announce the following awards to outstanding Grenadian as recommended by the National Awards Advisory Committee:

THE COMPANION OF THE ORDER OF GRENADA

Baroness Rosalind Howells

ORDER OF GRENADA GOLD AWARD OF EXCELLENCE

Suzanne Gaywood

THE SPICE ISLE AWARD

Alleyne Francique

Joachim Mark

THE CAMEHOGNE AWARD

Cresswell Julien (posthumous)

Irva Baptiste-Blackett

THE MEDAL OF HONOUR

Dr Lawrence Gibbs

I take this opportunity to congratulate all awardees on behalf of all Grenadians.

I thank you.