



Address by Prime Minister Hon. Tillman Thomas

at the ceremony marking Grenada's 36th Anniversary of Independence

"Celebrating our Nation's Birth with Love and Togetherness"

7 February 2010

Fellow Grenadians, friends, it is my honour and pleasure to address you on the occasion of our observance of our thirty sixth anniversary of independence. For the first time, we are having this ceremony during the afternoon as we seek to accommodate our religious customs, new features and engage more Grenadians. So I want to warmly welcome all of you to this celebratory event.

As we celebrate our nation's historic birth, our theme of love and togetherness is quite appropriate and timely. These desirable values of love and togetherness have traditionally characterized our Grenadian society over the years.

Our theme speaks to our collective desire to break from our history of conflict and political turbulence. Our recent experiences during the years 1974, 1979 and 1983 remain unsavory but instructive. It speaks of the dreams and aspirations of our fore fathers and patriots to build, aspire and advance as a people.

Our theme signals the emergence of a new dispensation in Grenada. A Grenada that is committed to the restoration of integrity, renewing hope and building together. A Grenada that is committed to positive change. A Grenada that is pursuing a vision of a nation that is free, a land of equal opportunity, a land of tolerance, fair play and prosperity for all.

These are the cherished values that we celebrate today. These are the attributes that were clearly exemplified during the past few weeks as Grenadians demonstrated their overwhelming support and solidarity with our Haitian neighbours. These are the qualities we need to foster as

a people if we are to collectively and successfully confront the current challenges of nation building.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you all are aware, we live in challenging yet exciting times. A time, when the world is in social and economic crisis. A crisis that encompasses every social and economic sector, every nation and every people.

A crisis, whose adverse impacts are being felt almost everywhere. For example, unemployment has risen in most countries. In the United States, over 16 million persons are out of work-the largest number in that country's economic history. This is over 10% of the labour force. In Canada this rate is just under 10%. In Europe unemployment stands at 9.2%. We in the Caribbean have not been spared the onslaught of this global recession. We have all faced steep declines in remittances, declines in revenue from tourism, reductions in financing, reductions in direct investment and reductions in grants. Unemployment has also risen considerably and varies from country to country.

What does all this mean to every Grenadian? How do we cope as a people? As a direct response to these developments, government's around the world have moved to implement massive fiscal stimulus packages, financial sector bailouts and corporate rescue packages to contain unemployment levels and to forestall prolonged contraction. We in Grenada have implemented our own stimulus package despite our limited resources. This targeted intervention in specific areas was able to bear fruit and we were able to keep our economic ship afloat.

We were able to stabilize our economy during the past year. Our prudent management has restored international financial credibility. This was acknowledged and applauded by the international and regional financial community.

Our bold and resolute approach to sound economic management enabled the achievement of many goals. Most importantly, it laid the basis for transforming Grenada into a dynamic, prosperous and stable society, capable of sustaining a high quality of life for all Grenadians.

Together, we must now build on this modest achievement.

Together we must build our local institutions and our capacity to become more self-reliant and productive. We have inherited a rich heritage and culture. One that has enabled the growth, development and survival of our ancestors. One that has facilitated self-reliance, the utilization of our local resources and the preservation of our environment.

Together we must revisit our tried and tested customs, methods, practices and norms that served us well in the past. Out of this crisis, we must position Grenada for takeoff when growth returns.

That is why, after very careful consideration, consultation and analysis, we have come to the conviction that the economic sectors and activities which hold the greatest opportunities for our country are:

- Health and Education services;
- Tourism and Hospitality Services;
- Energy Development;
- Agri-business and;
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

That is why, at this point in our growth and development, we believe that these should be our lead growth sectors over the next twenty years and we must now position Grenada for the long haul. This will be the focus of our economic thrust.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is why as a government, we must maintain macro-economic stability and demonstrate a high level of fiscal responsibility and strong debt management. Without these elements, our Government cannot meet its obligations to provide services to you. Hence our focus on sound economic management.

This is why, we must continue to invest in our people. Our people are our most important investment for sustained growth and prosperity. Hence our focus on education and health. It is for this reason that we are endeavouring to create employment opportunities for every Grenadian who is able and willing to work - whether as an employee or self-employed person. In doing so, we shall generate demand and create economic momentum. Hence our focus on job creation and improving the business climate.

By pursuing these strategic priorities, we will contribute towards restoring the self-esteem and dignity of many Grenadians who have been deprived the opportunity for gainful employment for many years and who have been humiliated by the reality of dependency.

Brothers and sisters, this is why, we are investing in the productive sectors to get our economy growing again to increase our export earnings. Hence our focus on tourism, agriculture and energy development. In pursuing these investments, we remain ever mindful of our environment including our values, patrimony and heritage. As a caring people, we are providing for the poor and most vulnerable among us, to help them cushion the effects of the crisis. This is happening even as we endeavour to help them out of poverty with investments in human development.

Ladies and gentlemen, with your support, with your prayers and with your collaboration, we will resolutely pursue our development agenda. There is one requirement for our success,...We must work together. A crisis requires that all hands should be on board. Let us put our differences behind. Every day is not an election day. Our task now is to build a better Grenada and renew hope. We must demonstrate a greater sense of patriotism and commitment towards nation building. Just as we have demonstrated the courage and fortitude to overcome adversity in the past, we will do it again.

With our leadership, we will succeed, and we all will benefit. I urge all of you to be patient, to persevere and to dedicate your efforts to rebuilding Grenada for our families, our communities and our country. I am of the firm belief, that this year will be a much better year for our nation. So as we enjoy our celebrations I urge you to remember that Love beareth all things

Love hopeth all things

Love endures all things

And love never fails

I thank you and may God Bless Grenada.