



Address by Prime Minister Hon. Tillman Thomas

at the ceremony marking Grenada's 39th Anniversary of Independence

National Stadium, 7 February 2013

My dear citizens and friends of Grenada, I bring you warm greetings on the occasion of our 39th year of Independence.

Today as we celebrate, we are mindful of the significant strides that we have made as an emerging small nation. We have accomplished much in every sphere of life as a nation. Our latest and most noteworthy has been in the field of sport when we won our first ever gold medal at the 2012 Olympics. This victory we should continuously savor as it symbolizes the true spirit of the Grenadian people. As a people, we have been resilient, we have been strong and despite the many challenges, we were able to reach many milestones and to achieve many goals.

Fellow Grenadians, as we observe 39 years of independence, it is instructive to pause and to reflect on the real meaning of independence to us as a people. What were our objectives, and to what extent have they been met?

For us independence meant a break from the shackles of dependency and colonialism. It meant our ability to shape and chart our own development course. It meant our ability to freely participate in our own decision making process. It also provided a platform to take our rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of Nations.

Since 1974, every administration has contributed in some way to our growth and development along our independence journey.

Along the way, we have consistently demonstrated our will and perseverance as a nation. It can be said that a test of an independent nation is not in its ability to triumph when times are

good, but in its ability to endure and overcome when the going gets tough and the winds beat our sails at every turn.

For all of this, we are thankful. We are also thankful to those who played a major role in getting us to where we are today.

The efforts of T.A Marryshow and others who placed Grenada on a regional stage in the '40s and 60's must never be forgotten.

We must pay tribute to the father of our independence, Sir Eric Matthew Gairy for his vision, determination and resolve in taking the bold step towards achieving our Independence. Today we must pay tribute to all those who have worked hard in building the foundations of our nation. It is a foundation built on blood, sweat and tears of our ancestors. It is a foundation that should not only serve as an anchor, but it must also serve as a rudder that steers us in our journey to become a more secure and prosperous country.

Ladies and gentlemen, today I address you at a period of great uncertainty in the world. A world that is characterized by a deep economic crisis, rising unemployment, increasing poverty, increasing debt and restless populations. No country is immune.

Everyone is struggling to cope and only a few are doing better than most. Grenada as a small open country has very little headroom to maneuver and limited options. Only last week, these issues were clearly discussed across the region by the Governor of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank. In his review of the year 2012, he reported that the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union, experienced four consecutive years of negative growth. Real GDP is estimated to have declined by 0.1 per cent, compared with an average contraction in the previous three years (2009-2011) of 2.2 per cent. This was due to many factors including the deep recession, the structure and nature of our economies, the reduced demand and lack of competitiveness in the tourism sector and the large size and cost of running our governments.

We were also affected by the large debts, our low productivity levels, our over stretched government, our underperforming private sector and the unrealistic expectations of our people.

These are the harsh realities that characterize our region. These are the conditions that Grenada as a country has to navigate and chart a course in its path towards sustainable development.

It is against this background that Grenada's performance over the past four years has to be measured. What have we accomplished? During the past four years, we were able to stabilize our economy.

In 2011 we were able to record growth of 1.1% outperforming the trend in the ECCU. Preliminary estimates for 2012 indicate that despite the challenges, we were able to maintain our positive growth.

Ladies and gentlemen, the fact is that:

WE HAVE STEMMED THE TIDE AND TURNED AROUND A DIFFICULT SITUATION WITH LIMITED RESOURCES

Most importantly, we have begun the process of economic and social transformation, bringing improvements to the lives of the Grenadian people.

We have experienced tremendous gains in Agriculture with an average growth of 10% over the past three years. This as a direct result of our farm labour support, equipment support, fertilizer and our motivated farmers. We have seen substantial improvement in our human resource with the restructuring of the educational curriculum to include skills development. The refurbishing and expansion of many schools, teacher training and hundreds of scholarships for our youths have begun to transform our educational landscape. Our youth development programme and the Grenada Cadet Corps is instilling discipline, importing knowledge and empowering our young people.

Our social safety nets have been reorganized, consolidated and expanded to deliver more benefits to our citizens.

Our prudent economic management has brought some measure of fiscal stability and has laid a sound platform for future growth, pursuing our five economic pillars.

As part of our good governance agenda, we have strengthened our democratic institutions. The merit system is taking root in the police force and the public service and individuals are appreciating this. On the international scene, more doors and opportunities are opening up for Grenadians in response to our good management philosophy and practices. In addition to all of this and despite the challenging times, we were able to preserve all the jobs in the public sector. We did so when some were taking salary cuts and others lost their jobs even in developed countries.

We are once again a proud Grenadian people.

Ladies and gentlemen, Grenada is at a critical point in its history as a nation. As we approach the next 39 years, we are at a point where we have to decide collectively on what type of country we desire.

We have to determine what type of country that we aspire to build. We have to determine what type of country that we will bequeath to our next generation. My vision, my hope and my dream, is that collectively we need to work together to build a sustainable Grenada. A Grenada that can provide for the needs of all its people now and in the future. A Grenada that holds dearly to its core values of respect, dignity, integrity and the rule of Law. A Grenada that preserves its heritage and assets for the future generation. And we need to build a Grenada that is respected and admired as a peaceful country.

Ladies and gentlemen, if we are to realize this dream, there are a few things that we must do:

- We must forge political and social consensus on our critical goals and objectives. In this vein, consensus and agreement between the major stakeholders on wages, prices, incomes and productivity is absolutely essential. We have to be able to sit discuss, compromise and agree on what is good for Grenada.
- We must push aggressively to implement our transformational plans. Our five pillars of economic transformation namely, Education, Health and Wellness, Energy Development, Tourism and Hospitality Services, Agriculture and Agri-business and ICT must be embraced by all. It should be noted that the Governor of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank has recommended and endorsed these same transformational pillars. In the same vein, I am happy to see that they are now getting wider support as the way forward for our country. We welcome this development.
- We must find new ways to ensure the active involvement of all our people in our transformational efforts going forward. This is about our people's development.

Ladies and gentlemen, the time is now.

There is no turning back.

We have made much progress since our independence. However, we need to accelerate our pace of growth. We need to become more productive and competitive.

We need to change the way we do things and to make major adjustments and sacrifices.

We have laid a good foundation and the platform is there. We have the talent, the capacity and the will. We have been a resilient and persevering people. We have braved many storms and charted turbulent courses to arrive at this juncture. We cannot afford to turn back now.

We must move ahead with the determination to take this nation to higher heights.

We must continue to invest in our people. We must continue to ensure that Education remains the beacon of hope for all our people; a pathway to a secure future. In this regard, we must ensure that the UWI Open Campus becomes a reality in 2013. When that project is completed, St. Andrew will be a bridge of hope for so many Grenadians.

I am confident that together we will aspire and advance as one people. I am confident that we will make the right choices. Inspired by the achievements of Kirani James and our Olympic team we will make Grenada a better place.

In conclusion, I want to repeat my observations of September 08, 2011 in a national address when I noted that Kirani's brilliant performances are powerful reminders of three important lessons for Grenada.

First, is that greatness can come from humble beginnings.

Second, that with hard work and tenacity, we can accomplish our goals.

Third, that regardless of how you start, it is important to finish strong.

Grenada will finish strong. We are on the right track.

Let's stay the course.

Let us embrace these lessons as we strive to build our Nation together.

Happy 39th anniversary of Independence and may God Bless our nation.