



## **Address by Leader of the Opposition Tillman Thomas of the National Democratic Congress on the Occasion of Grenada's 33<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of Independence**

**7 February 2007**

Our 33<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of Independence is an opportune time to take stock of ourselves as an Independent nation State.

Our 33<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary comes 174 years since our Emancipation. In tracing the trajectory of our history we can feel aptly proud of what we have achieved over those 174 years and in particular the last 33 years since achieving political independence from the United Kingdom.

We would recall that our Independence was born with the painful pangs of struggle to preserve democracy and civil and political rights as the Union Jack was lowered at the stroke of midnight on February 6<sup>th</sup> 1974 and our Grenadian Flag was raised soon thereafter.

But what a bright occasion it was even if the entire country was in darkness and without electricity the result of a general strike in the struggle to preserve democracy and human rights. Since then the nation State of Grenada and it's people have experienced socio-economic progress and adversity both political and by national disasters.

Today as we reflect on the Independence theme, "Enhancing Growth and Revenue - Empowering the Youth, Protecting the Vulnerable", it is important that all stake-holders are on board and proper planning and management are effected to facilitate the economic development of our country.

On the occasion of this 33<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary, our country is beset with many problems. Unemployment remains high. Violent crime is on the rise. Our youth are becoming alienated. The body politic has been poisoned by greed, corruption, graft and mismanagement. There is a serious attack on the institutions of the State.

Parliament has been degenerated. Accountability to the people is absent. Public morality has declined and mismanagement of the resources of the State is one of the major factors threatening the quality of life of our citizens and the economic future of our country.

The ruling party has thrown our country into a mountain of debt - over 1.5 billion dollars. This debt is more than 130% of our GDP. But our problems are not confined to the economic and ethical issues. We are also witnessing a sustained assault on the independence of the judiciary coupled with the subversion of Parliament and Parliamentary practice. These are grave dangers facing our nation State.

Single-handedly the NNP has destroyed the good image of our country by its invitation to crooks and fraudsters. The offshore banking sector has been destroyed and Grenada black-listed. Several of its ambassadors have been convicted for crimes and are in prison. The early misguided policy of preference to low end IT industry over agriculture has under-mined our agricultural capacity and heightened the frustration of our farmers.

The sale of our passports has led to the imposition of visas by Canada. Grenada, as a Commonwealth nation enjoyed this historic privilege until it was destroyed by the NNP. Now the economic salvation of our current and future development that is our gas and oil resources are poised to go the same way as the Call Centers and the offshore banking sectors.

There must be an enabling environment to give effect to the theme, "Enhancing Growth and Revenue - Empowering the Youth, Protecting the Vulnerable". It is important that all stakeholders are on board and structures are put in place to facilitate capacity building.

There isn't a better way to empower our youth than being good role models in our communities. It is necessary to instill good values in our young people and respect for our vital institutions. We have to create the environment to promote those values that are necessary for order and social stability in our communities.

The re-activation of the Boy's Scout movement and the 4H movement together with promoting clubs around sporting organisations would help to create a better environment for empowering our young people and providing them with positive direction.

In dealing with the Nation's business transparency and accountability should be our watchwords. Issues of governance and management of resources should be foremost on our minds because of recent developments that have taken place in our beloved country. As a Nation, we must do our utmost to maintain a good image at all times. We must harness the skills and talents of all our people in our developmental efforts.

In order to protect the vulnerable in our midst we have to strengthen our Institutions and create employment opportunities through efficient management of our resources. The staging of World Cup 2007 would put our managerial skills to the test. If we could position ourselves as service providers to obtain maximum benefit from participating in the staging of World Cup 2007 we would have achieved what is expected of an independent nation.

In conclusion, we must remind ourselves of the importance of being patriotic, not only symbolically but by respecting our institutions and adhering to the rule of law.

If the environment is not conducive to social stability we will, as a Nation become more vulnerable to abuses of all sorts. At this 33<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of Independence our nation deserves better. Her Majesty's Opposition is committed to restoring our Nation's image within the region and international community and to re-establish trust between the citizens and the government.

I salute you.