



Throne Speech 2004

Most Gracious Speech to Both Houses of Parliament

Delivered by

The Governor-General

His Excellency Sir Daniel C. Williams, GCMG, QC

On the occasion of The Ceremonial State Opening of the

First Session of the Seventh Parliament

9th January 2004

Greetings

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, Members of the Senate and the House of Representatives, it is my pleasure to extend very best wishes for abundant peace and progress for the New Year, as we convene the First Session of the Seventh Parliament.

Introduction

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, as we begin the New Year, which will mark Grenada's thirtieth anniversary of Independence, it is most appropriate that this period in our Nation's development give added focus to intensifying the involvement of people and to strengthening the consultative process.

I am very happy to inform that in commemorating our thirtieth anniversary of Independence, a Commission will be established, with the responsibility of identifying and recommending sites and monuments throughout the Nation in honour of outstanding citizens, past and present.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, with a more balanced composition to our Parliament, we can anticipate debates and discussions in both Houses that will serve to further educate and deepen our citizens' involvement in our democratic institutions, as well as increase civic awareness and enhance understanding about the general operations of Government.

One of the most exciting initiatives to facilitate citizens' involvement will be the establishment of a Citizens' Consultation Council. The Department of Human Resources in the Prime Minister's Office has prepared a Discussion Paper outlining different options for institutionalising such a Council. An internal Ministerial Committee is being established to study the Discussion Paper and advise on the most effective measures to embark on this promising new initiative and to ensure the widest possible participation.

The year 2004 will also mark another important anniversary for our Nation; namely the twentieth anniversary of the restoration of democracy. During the past two decades, our Nation has participated in five General Elections, reflecting the will of the citizenry and the confidence our people have in this vitally important national institution of Parliament.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, my Government is committed to the governance of Inclusion and Consultation. Towards this end, since the General Election of November 27, 2003, Ministers of Government, as well as Public Officers, have been undertaking meetings and discussions with various interest groups, including political parties. In the weeks and months ahead, such consultations will be intensified and broadened in order to deepen the process of engagement.

As my Government pursues its policy of sound fiscal management, it is mindful of the priority to

be given to the increasing demands for services in health care, education and public assistance. In that context, I wish to advise that the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2004 will be laid in the House of Representatives soon.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to outline some of my Government's priorities for the year 2004.

Focus on People

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, integrated social development will be given top priority in 2004 and beyond. This will allow Government to focus on all the needs of the individual, particularly those persons who are vulnerable. Needs with respect to health care, education and skills development, public assistance and other social services would take precedence. The objective in this approach is to build responsible, skilled and educated individuals who could generate appropriate incomes for themselves and their families, and productivity for the Country.

Our focus on people would include developments in culture and the performing arts. My Government is very much aware of the need for more opportunities for skills development in these fields. Training and development will be initiated locally through the education system and, also, by enabling more young people to go abroad on scholarships in order to hone their skills to international standards.

We have a variety of skills and talents in the Country and we need to spread the opportunities to allow these talents to flourish. Scholarships for academic pursuits and skills development will be pursued locally, regionally and internationally. Moreover, adjustments to curricula in primary and secondary schools will be required to allow for development of talents in culture, entertainment and performing arts.

This will help to increase employment, particularly in the entertainment sector. My Government regards this sector as virtually untapped in terms of the enormous potential of our people. In support of this initiative, my Government plans to seek assistance in order to modernise the Intellectual Property legislation.

Knowledge

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, in declaring the first decade of the new century the Knowledge Enhancement Decade, my Government was cognisant of the fact that without access to knowledge, Grenada would not be able to successfully compete in the international community.

Several steps have been taken during the first three years of the Decade to realise our

Millennium Vision, but there is still much more to be done. One of our main instruments in this regard is the transformation of our national college, the T.A. Marryshow Community College.

It is the intention of my Government to convert TAMCC into a statutory authority, giving it the flexibility and degree of freedom required to provide a fuller range of training at higher levels. This will require new legislation, which my Government will lay before the House of Representatives, following consultation with the relevant stakeholders.

While TAMCC will be my Government's main instrument in making skills acquisition and utilisation more readily available to a wider cross section of citizens, the Skills Training Centres in Sauteurs and Seamoan will be improved and learning opportunities will also be provided through better utilisation of Community Centres.

My Government envisions many more activities of learning and personal development to take place in our Community Centres. This will require greater participation at the village level in the operations of these Centres.

Business and Private Sector Development

My Government recognises that foreign investments are necessary if our Country is to develop at an acceptable pace. Such investments are needed to provide jobs for our citizens and sustainable projects that contribute to the further modernisation of our society. In order to ensure this, and in keeping with the deepening of the consultative process, my Government intends to establish a multi-disciplinary Investment Committee to assess all proposals from foreign investors.

This Committee would comprise professional persons with specific expertise and experience in required disciplines. Responsibilities of the Committee would include conducting background checks on potential investors, examining the technical and financial feasibility of proposed investments, evaluating the economic benefits and opportunities that would accrue to our citizens and the business community, and assessing the environmental implications of such proposed investments.

Madam President, just as all citizens are expected and required to respect the laws of our Country, so too are foreign investors. Similarly, when respected investors select our Country as the location for major projects, in which millions of dollars are invested and many jobs created for Grenadians, it is important that our citizens demonstrate respect towards such investors. Attempts to slander and falsely accuse bonafide investors of wrongdoings is not only unpatriotic, such irresponsible behaviour only serves to frighten other potential investors.

Labour

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, one of the major plans for my Government will be the establishment of a National Apprenticeship Programme. The Ministry of Labour, in consultation with the Trade Unions, private sector groups and various educational officials, will embark on a thorough study to determine the most appropriate system.

This is necessary, since so many of our skilled persons do not enjoy the recognition or certification they deserve and require. The National Apprenticeship Programme will cover such skills as wood sculpting, arts and crafts, yacht repairs, automotive technology, the various construction trades, and electrical and mechanical engineering.

The emphasis will be on modern technological skills that will enable the individual to generate personal income and contribute to national development. Where possible, on-line tutoring will be utilised to support and accelerate such training.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, as my Government continues its efforts to maintain a healthy and productive industrial relations climate, it is important for all stakeholders to recognise that stability is critical in this regard. This requires a constructive and cooperative approach to settling any disputes that may arise. It is in this context, therefore, that my Government remains committed to ensuring that the rights of workers are protected, without jeopardising the stability of the State.

Youth

The appointment of a Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office with responsibility for Youth Development demonstrates the high priority my Government places on our young people. Indeed, my Government has provided several programmes designed to help young people realise their potential and become productive and responsible citizens.

The National Youth Policy, which has been in the making since 1998, has been approved by Cabinet and will be laid before Parliament during this Session. The extensive consultation process that led to the formulation of this Policy, has served as a guide for my Government in the implementation of several popular programmes that will be expanded and improved in 2004.

The Youth Parliament will be extended to the Parish level, while a new Community Youth Outreach Programme will be started.

The Imani Programme will be expanded to assist participants who complete the on-the-job training component to find permanent employment, particularly in the areas of tourism and

hospitality, agro-processing, agriculture and manufacturing.

The Leadership Development Programme will also be expanded, in keeping with my Government's holistic approach to Youth Development. Model Youth Development Centres providing After School and Weekend Programmes will be established at the Youth Centre in Morne Rouge and the Community Centre in River Sallee, with the long-term goal to establish such centres in all seven parishes.

Support to the National Youth Council will be increased and all Government Ministries will support the Council in providing entrepreneurial, management and leadership training for members of properly constituted youth organisations. A Task Force will be established to examine the feasibility of introducing a National Youth Service Corps.

A facility for young offenders will soon be opened in Grand Bacolet, St. David's, which will provide opportunities for counselling, personal growth, education and skills development. This facility will bring hope and the chance of rehabilitation for those young people who have found themselves on the wrong side of the law.

Law and Order

The collaborative approach with respect to Law and Order in our society is well documented. This approach has resulted in the formulation of a National Strategy and Action Plan on Crime and Drugs. This document has been approved by Cabinet and will be laid before the House of Representatives shortly. This comprehensive report makes far-reaching recommendations that present a holistic approach to dealing with crime and drugs in our society.

In order to successfully implement the Strategy and Action Plan, all stakeholders must be involved. This includes Government, the religious community, our security forces, non-governmental groups, the private sector, the teaching fraternity and, of course, the local community.

Meanwhile, my Government will continue to provide opportunities for Officers of the Royal Grenada Police Force to improve their skills and knowledge. Implementation of the Community Policing Programme will continue. This Programme is receiving support through the Public Sector Management Improvement Programme, which is coordinated by the Department of Human Resources in the Prime Minister's Office. In this regard, a Manual on Community Policing will be published for Police Officers and statistics profiling each community will be compiled to assist Officers at the village level.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, legislation pertaining to rape and statutory rape will be

reviewed with the intention of having much stiffer penalties for those persons convicted of violating others, particularly those who take advantage of our young girls and boys. Moreover, when a convicted rapist is released from prison, the community will be informed, as a preventative measure.

Education

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, the records show that education remains a top priority of my Government. Indeed, education is the foundation upon which the social and economic transformation of our society is being realised.

Significant developments have taken place with respect to the expansion and upgrading of existing schools, as well as the construction of new schools. However, there are limitations in our education system that my Government will seek to address.

Limited school places, coupled with the Common Entrance Examination selection process, at the tender age of 11 or 12, have resulted in a significant number of our students leaving the education system still under-educated or functionally illiterate.

We need to arrest this trend and to deal with the backlog of functional illiteracy, which is too commonplace, even among some of our most skilled workers.

At the level of our secondary schools, it is the intention of my Government to raise the quality of tutoring in order to double the percentage level of passes within five years. Greater attention must be given to those students who would only get four or five subjects and often leave school, feeling that they have failed. It also means that we will require more spaces for students entering secondary school.

Curricula Reform will continue with emphasis on rationalising the Primary Curriculum, streamlining the Secondary School Curriculum, strengthening technical and vocational education, as well as utilising more locally produced educational materials.

My Government will continue to place emphasis on Special Education through the strengthening of the Task Force on Special Education and the employment of an Officer with responsibility for Special Education.

School supervision will be strengthened through the establishment of seven District Education Offices, supported by Education Officers, Curriculum Development Officers, Guidance and Counselling Officers and representatives of Denominational Boards.

The Books and Uniform Programme will be strengthened by a World Bank Revolving Book

Scheme that will benefit 3,000 students annually. This is in addition to the thousands of current beneficiaries under the Republic of China/Government of Grenada Books and Uniform Programme.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker communication and understanding between parents and teachers are essential to facilitate the overall development of our school children. Collaboration with the National Parent Teacher Association will, therefore, seek to involve parents more effectively in the education system and to ensure all parents take a keener interest in the education of their children.

The goal of making learning a major national objective during this Decade of Knowledge Enhancement is attainable, given the history of my Government's accomplishments with respect to improving the physical environment and providing more class space, as well as facilitating the quality of teaching.

It should be noted, Madam President, Mr. Speaker, that the number of students who sat the Common Entrance Examination and were placed in our secondary schools increased from 40 percent in 1999 to 56.6 percent in 2003.

Moreover, the computer has become a necessary teaching tool. With computer laboratories established in our secondary schools, focus will turn to providing computer access for primary school students in 2004 and beyond.

Indeed, Madam President, Mr. Speaker, education remains my Government's major instrument for the empowerment of our people and security for our future.

Information Communication Technology (ICT)

Just as education remains a major instrument for the empowerment of our people, my Government regards ICT as a major instrument of the education process. The cost effectiveness and efficiency provided by ICT must be further embraced in order to provide more people - young and old alike - access to the Internet.

My Government will therefore seek to ensure access to the Internet at affordable rates through negotiations, incentives and the creation of a more competitive telecommunications environment.

With the establishment of the Central Information Management Agency at the Prime Minister's Office in 2002, the application of ICT in the Public service has been intensified. Since then, my Government has built its own inter-ministerial computer network, which includes email and other data services. As a result, communications within the public service has improved.

My Government's ICT Strategy places more attention on deploying ICT into the wider population. Many people remain intimidated by the computer simply because they have not been exposed to a keyboard or a computer screen.

My Government hopes to help people overcome these inhibitions by installing computers in Community Centres and other locations.

Carriacou and Petit Martinique

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, infrastructural developments will continue on Carriacou and Petit Martinique and efforts to enhance eco-tourism will be pursued. This will include improvements to the natural assets of these islands, with emphasis on environmental conservation and the preservation of archaeological sites, as well as the cessation of sand mining.

The architectural drawings have been completed for a Multi-purpose Resource Centre at Hillsborough, for which construction will begin this year.

Construction of the Small Business Incubators, in collaboration with the Grenada Industrial Development Corporation, is ongoing, as my Government continues to provide opportunities for aspiring entrepreneurs. This initiative will result in an Industrial Park at Dumfries.

The feasibility study for the upgrading and expansion of the Lauriston Airport has been completed, and work is expected to begin on the Airport later this year.

My Government is working with Health Cap, a team of health professionals, for the construction of a Medical Centre in Hillsborough, which will provide special services and treatments.

Preliminary work has begun for the construction of a Sporting and Cultural facility in Lauriston.

Sports Development

The love of sports is undisputed in our society. Sports are an important part of our school system. Sports are an integral component of local community activities. Indeed, my Government has always regarded sporting activities to be essential to human and national development.

In 2004, my Government will continue to work towards the completion of rural sporting facilities, which began in 2001.

With greater emphasis on facilitating sporting and other recreational activities at the village

level, a new Community Based Programme will be initiated for netball, football, cricket and track and field. This Programme will encourage the formation of Parish Sports Councils and volunteering by former sports men and women in the communities.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that the first draft of the National Sports Policy will be circulated to all stakeholders in the first quarter of 2004. Consultations will be held in all seven parishes to enable input from the various sporting sectors of the Country. The objective is to have the National Sports Policy completed by December.

Work on upgrading the Cricket Stadium will begin this year as we prepare for the World Cup of 2007. The redesigning of the players pavilion, the building of corporate boxes and the improvement of the media pavilion will be undertaken.

Foreign Affairs and International Trade

My Government is determined to continue Grenada's efforts to honour its obligations to tackle international terrorism and crime.

In the first quarter of 2004, Grenada will complete the process at the United Nations to accede to the Convention on Transnational Organised Crime. Work will also be undertaken to complete accession to the United Nations Convention Against Torture, which my Government has already signed.

In keeping with my Government's steadfast commitment to Regional Integration, a programme will be instituted to raise awareness among the populace about the operations of the Caribbean Community. This will include a media promotion and other measures to better prepare Grenadians for the CARICOM Single Market and Economy, which is scheduled for implementation on January 1, 2005.

In the framework of the partnerships with the African, Caribbean, Pacific (ACP) countries, Grenada, together with other Caribbean countries, will commence negotiations for a Regional Economic Partnership Agreement with the European Union.

Our overseas Embassies and Missions will continue to promote the interests of Grenada in pursuing my Government's stated commitment to broaden its focus on social programmes. This includes such areas as health care services, education and skills development and the provision of investment opportunities throughout Grenada, Carriacou and Petit Martinique.

Legal Affairs

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, the expanding needs of the Public Service, the Regional

Integration process and the need for ongoing legislative reform have put additional demands on the Ministry of Legal Affairs.

As a result, books and electronic learning materials will be procured for the Ministry and the Director of Public Prosecution. The Ministry will also upgrade its ICT network to provide better on-line services to enhance research capabilities.

Strengthening of the Supreme Court Registry will continue, and Officers will be assigned to address Court Administration, Deeds and Lands and Intellectual Properties.

Participation in the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court of Justice Connection Mediation Pilot Project will continue. This Project is designed to reduce and complement court reform, reduce the delay and backlog of court cases, reduce costs of resolving disputes, increase compliance with court judgements, and provide litigants with an informal alternative to adjudication.

Tourism

In 2004 the provision of amenities for visitors throughout the Nation continues. Of significant importance will be the Forts Restoration Project. This Project is proceeding with assistance from the European Union, and features the implementation of a management plan for our historic Forts Matthew, Frederick and George.

Another project to come on stream in 2004 will be the Life Guard Services. In the first instance, Lifeguard Services will be provided at Bathway and Grand Anse beaches. As the Project becomes institutionalised, the service will be extended to other water-based attraction sites.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, one of the most exciting and far-reaching projects that will come to fruition in 2004 is the Melville Street Cruise Ship Terminal Project. This Project will offer many opportunities for our citizens involved in tourism, farming, agro-processing and, indeed, the wider business community, as it will bring thousands of new visitors to our shores.

2004 will also see an expansion to the number of hotel rooms. This will include the commencement of at least three major hotel projects. Additionally, a Hospitality Arts and Tourism School will be established.

Health and the Environment

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, my Government recognises that the future of our Nation is very much determined by the health of our people. Indeed, access to efficient and affordable health care is a fundamental right of every citizen.

Improvements to Hospital Services will continue in 2004 and a review of Community Health Services will be undertaken. The goal is to expand the health care network by increasing Community Health Services. This would allow primary and community health care to be managed by community-linked executive agencies at the Parish level.

The Princess Royal and Princess Alice Hospitals will be upgraded in 2004 and beyond to provide services in paediatrics, physiotherapy, x-ray, obstetrics and gynaecology, as well as expanded laboratory services.

Dialysis and other specialised services will be introduced this year, while the implementation of the National AIDS/HIV Strategy will continue, including the provision of free Anti-retroviral drugs.

The formulation of a comprehensive health policy will also be pursued. It is the intention of my Government to decentralise management of Hospital Services, with the eventual creation of an Executive Agency. Construction of Phase Two of the General Hospital Project and the implementation of continuous Quality Improvement Projects will also continue.

Legislation with respect to Mental Health, Environmental Health and Medical and Nursing Practitioners will be reviewed and updated, in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, given the many natural assets of our Country and the need to protect and preserve these assets, my Government will embark on a campaign to promote Environmental Sustainability and Awareness. In this regard, work will begin on the establishment of an Environmental Health Authority to focus coordination on solid and liquid waste management, vector control, occupational health and safety, among other areas.

Consideration will also be given to the introduction of measures, including stiffer penalties, to reduce the instances of littering by individuals, industry and businesses. Moreover, much greater emphasis will be placed on enforcing existing legislation in order to provide greater protection for our environment.

Agriculture and Fisheries

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, vibrant and sustainable Agriculture and Fisheries sectors are essential for the overall development of our Nation. My Government is mindful of the fact that the global environment requires our farmers, agro-processors and fishers to be more competitive. It also requires that we ensure our own Food Security by increasing production and, where possible, reducing imports.

My Government has embraced such policy directions, which will be expanded and intensified in

2004. This will require significant changes and structural re-organisation of the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Forestry and Fisheries, in order to improve food production efficiencies in the Country, to minimise the threats created by the global economy and to improve services to the farming and fishing sectors.

The Planning Unit will be upgraded to undertake more relevant research to aid policy formulation, as well as enhanced monitoring and evaluation of projects. The European Union has committed 1.3 million dollars, over the next two years, to strengthen the Ministry's planning capacity.

The Unit will also provide guidance to the private sector in order to facilitate more agro-processing and expansion of the poultry industry.

The regulatory functions of the Ministry will be strengthened in order to safeguard agricultural lands and other natural resources. My Government intends to rigorously enforce the law with respect to the illegal construction of houses and other structures on public lands. Similarly, in collaboration with other stakeholders, my Government will endeavour to regularize the tenure of families that have occupied Crown lands for several years.

Implementation of the National Forest Policy will continue, focusing on conservation, watershed protection, preservation of wild life sanctuaries and eco-tourism.

My Government's ongoing Food Security programme has continued to impact positively on the farming community and households. Additionally, Grenada will benefit from the CARICOM/CARIFORUM Food Security Programme, which will soon be implemented. This Programme will establish twelve demonstration plots with irrigation units for farmers.

The Ministry will continue to work with the various Commodity Boards to improve their operations, their relevance and efficiencies, and to pursue more secondary processing of our primary agricultural products, especially nutmeg and cocoa.

My Government will continue efforts to combat Praedial Larceny, including the introduction of tougher legislation and the completion of the ongoing registration of farmers and others involved in the sale of agricultural produce.

Measures will be taken to ensure that our Marine Resources are maintained through proper management, including protection from illegal fishing activities. Additional support will be provided in marketing and safety.

Grenada will work diligently to maintain its status in fish exports as the only country in the Eastern Caribbean with access to markets in the European Union. This is due to the fact that

Grenada's fish exports meet international health and sanitary standards.

The Energy Sector

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, my Government has enunciated a policy that will ensure affordable and adequate energy supplies. Towards this end, petroleum exploration will be pursued with the aim of increasing domestic energy supplies.

My Government will continue to work within CARICOM to identify and develop alternative energy sources. In this context, Grenada will benefit from the Regional Energy Policy being developed by a CARICOM Task Force.

Efforts will continue to enhance and build the capacity and competence of the Electrical Inspection Unit of the Ministry of Works, Communications and Transport.

Collaboration will continue with Grenada Electricity Services Ltd. for the installation of streetlights throughout the Country.

My Government has received technical assistance from the Organisation of American States and the Climate Institute of Washington to draft new legislation that will govern activities related to the generation, transmission and distribution of electricity. This is in keeping with my Government's stated goal of liberalising the electricity market to facilitate competition, cost effectiveness and fair rates to consumers.

Public Sector Reform

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, my Government has undertaken extensive reform in the Public Service in recent years, which has resulted in improved services to citizens and more training opportunities for Public Officers. This will continue in 2004 and a comprehensive Performance Management System will be implemented to enhance accountability, improve service delivery and monitor Government programmes.

Additionally, consultation has been an important component of this Reform, as my Government continues its quest to improve services to individuals, institutions and the private sector.

A Round Table Discussion with a wide cross-section of private sector representatives was conducted in September and, as a result, an Action Plan was developed. Implementation of this Action Plan will begin in 2004, which includes review and amendment to legislation affecting the private sector.

The Public Sector Reform initiative includes assistance in the restructuring of the Grenada

Industrial Development Corporation as a more effective “one stop business centre” for investors. This includes the Corporation’s role in investment promotion, identifying suitable markets for local products and services, as well as the provision of pertinent statistical information from relevant ministries.

Public Sector Reform also addresses my Government’s Commercialisation Programme. Efforts will be made to move this Programme forward, with technical assistance from the World Bank, in order to further reduce wastage in the Public Service, enhance transparency and increase opportunities for the establishment of more small businesses.

Technical assistance and advice has been sought from the Commonwealth Fund to review the Pension System for Public Officers, with a view to examine options and make recommendations for an equitable and sustainable system. This would include Public Officers appointed after April 4, 1983, who are disadvantaged by the Pension Disqualification Act of 1983.

Fiscal Policy

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, the Fiscal Incentives Review Committee has submitted its final report to my Government. In addition to improvements for the GIDC, the Committee recommends, among other things, that the Hotel Aids Act be reviewed and updated into a Tourism Development Act. My Government welcomes this recommendation and will seek to have the legislative review undertaken in 2004.

Consumer Protection

My Government, in its unwavering commitment to lowering the cost of living, will pursue its long-term stated goal of reduced taxes. However, in order to ensure that these reductions are passed on to consumers, the Price and Consumer Affairs Department will fall under the auspices of the Grenada Bureau of Standards. Tougher legislation and an aggressive public education programme would be provided to ensure consumers know which products fall under the Price Control Mechanism.

Social Services, Gender and Family Affairs and Housing

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, following the General Election, the Ministry of Social Services and Housing was merged with the Division of Gender and Family Affairs to form the Ministry of Social Services, Gender and Family Affairs and Housing.

The major objectives of this new Ministry in 2004 will be a review of all Social Services and implementation of a more integrated systematic approach to providing these services.

District Offices will initially be established in two parishes, as a means of decentralising the delivery of Social Services.

The new Ministry will consult with relevant stakeholders and obtain approval for the implementation of a National Policy on the Elderly. Similarly, further dialogue with relevant stakeholders will be held with the goal of implementing a National Parenting Programme, while the implementation of the Gender Policy will commence.

The Mobile Caregivers Programme for children zero to three years will be implemented, to effect early childhood stimulation and development. The Pilot Project of this Programme will begin in the Parish of St David's and will expand to other parishes later in the year.

Innumerable studies prove that teenage truancy, which leads to young offenders, has its beginning at a very early age. My Government will give attention to identifying, as early as in pre-primary schools, children who are tending to be deviant for special consideration.

A review of and further implementation of the Domestic Violence Act will be pursued. Additionally, my Government intends to establish a functional Probation Unit.

The Ministry will seek to implement the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States Family Law Reform Project through stakeholder and public consultations on the reform of Grenada's Family Law. Some components of Family Law are marriage and common law relationships, divorce and separation, domestic violence, property interests, children and maintenance for children, paternity, custody and adoption, as well as Family Court.

The Ministry will establish and implement a Housing Policy, in collaboration with the Housing Authority of Grenada, to address the needs of low-income earners.

Construction of a Multi-Purpose Centre for the Disabled will be undertaken, in conjunction with the Coalition for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which comprises the Grenada National Council for the Disabled, St. George's University and the Independent Group for Home Living.

Communication, Works and Transport

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, infrastructural development under my Government has exceeded expectations in recent years. The extensive road network and the improvements in the provision of water, electricity and telephone services are indisputable.

The Ministry of Communications, Works and Transport has been instrumental in these unprecedented developments, and in 2004, this Ministry will adopt a strategic approach to operations.

While continuing with ongoing capital projects, the emphasis will be placed on improving efficiency and cost effectiveness.

A systematic approach to Road Maintenance will be adopted which will include an inventory of all infrastructure assets, an evaluation of present conditions and the development of a comprehensive Programme of Preventative Maintenance. This Programme will be supported by the computerisation of specific operations for effective resource management, and greater operational efficiency.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, 2003 ended with severe flooding in a number of locations, including River Road, and two serious incidents of rock falls in Grand Roy, as well as other landslides triggered by the heavy rains. Fortunately no lives were lost, but property damage was significant. The Ministry, in collaboration with the National Emergency Relief Organisation, is working with communities to develop programmes to assess hazards, manage the risks, and reduce or eliminate them, where possible.

The Ministry of Finance has requested emergency funds in soft loans of 1.3 million dollars from the World Bank through the Caribbean Development Bank. This emergency facility was used successfully in 2002 to assist farmers and others affected by Tropical Storm Lili.

Additionally, my Government had earlier requested a study from the World Bank to identify permanent solutions to flooding problems throughout the Country. This would entail the construction of concrete walls to support riverbanks at certain locations, as well as the dredging of rivers, among other measures. The draft study was received, and my Government has responded to the recommendations therein, and is now awaiting the final report from the World Bank.

The Ministry will also conduct a review of its organisation and management with a view to strengthening management and supervision, and achieving greater levels of functional efficiency. Significant emphasis will be placed on training and the provision of the support systems required for the achievement of this objective. Major projects that will continue in 2004 include construction of sea defences and rehabilitation along the Western Main Road.

The Caribbean Development Bank funded "Bridges and Roads Improvement Project" will see the construction of eleven bridges throughout the State, as well as roads in the Parishes of St. George's and St. David's.

The reconstruction of the Eastern Main Road from Grenville to Sauteurs and the Road from Woodlands through Lower Woburn to the Cliff will commence early in 2004, with assistance from the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development.

Conclusion

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, as we embark on a New Year, in this the Knowledge Enhancement Decade in Grenada, it is the sincere wish of my Government that we do so in the spirit of national unity and mutual respect.

My Government is committed to the fulfilment of its long-term vision for a healthy, educated, productive and prosperous Nation. The accomplishments of the past year and the exciting plans and programmes for the New Year are testimony to this vision.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, my wife joins me in wishing you, members of Parliament and all citizens and friends of Grenada health, happiness and peace for the New Year. Let us continue to be guided by God as we “aspire, build, advance as One People, One Family.” I thank you.