

THRONE SPEECH 2016:
Building on our Successes

Delivered to the Houses of Parliament
By
Her Excellency Dame Dr. Cecile La Grenade, Governor-General
On the occasion of the Fifth Session of the Ninth Parliament

Grenada Trade Centre

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10 A.M.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

Members of Parliament,

Our Nation embarks on this Fifth Session of the Ninth Parliament with a renewed sense of pride in its achievements. We are indeed a blessed and resilient Nation.

Only a week ago, our people participated in a Referendum exercise, designed to amend our Constitution after 40 years. My Government appreciates that constitution reform is a process, and is therefore heartened to have facilitated the Referendum process.

My Government therefore, would like to sincerely thank the people of this beautiful Nation for their love of country. We also commend the Constitutional Reform Advisory Committee, under the astute leadership of Dr. Francis Alexis, who valiantly answered the patriotic call to put country first. Today, we are closer to constitutional reform than we have ever been. My Government will continue to ensure that Constitutional reform is on the national agenda.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

The top priorities of my Government for this Session of Parliament will be the following: **building on the strong foundation of the recent past by investing better and smarter, to achieve strong, sustainable and inclusive growth; creating jobs and investment opportunities for our people; and strengthening national unity.**

Building on our Successes

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

Our economy is in a much stronger position than it was four years ago--thanks to the sacrifices and resilience of our people and the support of our development partners. We have made significant strides in restoring macroeconomic stability and putting Grenada back on its feet.

Economic growth has rebounded strongly since 2014 and our fiscal and debt situation have improved significantly. Unemployment has fallen and inflation has been relatively low. We have also built a durable and fortified fiscal framework to ensure fiscal discipline going forward, and have undertaken significant reforms to strengthen our economic fundamentals to promote higher economic growth and employment creation.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President,

The final review of the Home-Grown Programme will be completed next year. Mindful of the calls made, in particular by the Social Partners, to ensure that the gains of the Homegrown Programme are protected and sustained, my Government has involved this Committee in a comprehensive assessment of the Programme in order to receive feedback on what areas should be maintained, tweaked or removed altogether. This is a clear demonstration of my Government's willingness to strengthen national unity on matters of national importance.

Notwithstanding the progress made in just three years, the job remains to be completed. Significant challenges persist. While the unemployment rate has fallen and many new jobs have been created, the number of persons who are unemployed remain stubbornly and unacceptably high. Youth unemployment is of particular concern and must receive focused attention in this new Session of Parliament.

Our Nation must continue to be resolute in bringing more and more tangible benefits to our people.

Consistent with the foregoing imperatives, my Government will present the 2017 Budget on December 9, 2016 which will focus on working together with all sectors, to build on our successes, for a better country for ourselves and future generations.

Investing in our People

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President,

Investing in our people lies at the heart of our goals for economic prosperity going forward.

For this reason, my Government remains committed to building a creative and productive society. It is my Government's intention therefore to continue to invest heavily in Education. For 2017, the key focus areas are: schools' infrastructure, with funding assistance from CDB and other agencies; continued infusion of ICT within the school system; increased certification in technical and vocational skills; and capacity building of schools' professionals.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President,

The health of our Nation is the wealth of our Nation. My Government holds firmly to this philosophy. So far, significant investments have been made in addressing the fundamental problems in our healthcare system. My Government will continue to invest heavily in improving healthcare

delivery in our Country. A major focus will be on preventative healthcare, with the aim of curbing the increase in chronic non-communicable diseases such as hypertension and diabetes. Investment in health infrastructure with a strong focus on climate resilience will also be a priority. The completion of phase II of the General Hospital Project and the commencement of construction of the Gouyave Health Centre are two main interventions for next year.

Recognizing the need to provide quality healthcare services to all citizens, regardless of their economic situation, my Government remains committed to finding alternative means of financing healthcare through a National Health Insurance programme.

We are aware that we have not pursued this as aggressively as we would have liked, and have therefore taken steps to give it a renewed focus, by strengthening the logistics, leadership and capacity in order to move the process forward.

Currently, there is an advisory committee that continues to engage key stakeholders in a widespread consultative process to explore options for implementation. Honourable Emmalin Pierre, Minister for Implementation, has been asked to spearhead this process. My Government plans to fully roll out the National Health Insurance Plan by the middle of 2017.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President

Investing better for sustainable and job-rich growth

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President

It is imperative that we invest better and smarter to achieve higher levels of economic growth that is sustainable and job-rich, with more and more benefits accruing for our citizens.

Critical to achieving high, sustainable and job-rich growth is the whole issue of competitiveness. Accordingly, my Government will continue to implement reforms to boost the competitiveness of the Grenadian economy.

Specifically, our efforts to reform the electricity sector, lower energy prices and transition towards renewable energy will be sustained. The high oil prices during the period 2007 and 2008 and its negative impact on consumers are still fresh in our minds. The new Electricity Supply and the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission Acts have already been passed in Parliament and the new framework is expected to be fully operational by January 2017. We cannot engage in a serious discussion about sustainable development without fundamentally addressing the high cost of energy and energy security in our Country.

My Government will continue to work towards addressing existing deficiencies to improve Grenada's ease of doing business.

Several major steps have already been taken. My Government has passed in parliament a new Physical Planning and Development Control Act, for the introduction of new regulations for the development of the Construction Sector. This will contribute significantly to building our resilience to natural disasters.

We will soon implement the Single Window Module (License Module) on the ASYCUDA World System. This will simplify and automate certain Customs procedures to enhance trade facilitation.

We now have in place a Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act which brings Grenada in line with a modern insolvency regime. Most importantly, it provides the legal framework for restructuring of companies which did not exist prior to the passage of this Act.

In addition, the Investment Promotion Act and a new Incentives Regime have been enacted to support the development of key sectors in our economy. A new GIDC Act known as the Grenada Investment

Development Corporation Act has replaced the former Act, paving the way for this newly mandated economic development corporation to take a lead role in giving Grenada's economy the competitive advantage, while maintaining a transparent regime of incentives for all investors.

These important reforms will go a long way towards improving our competitiveness and removing bottlenecks to growth and development. Implementation, once again, is critical to realizing the full benefits of these reforms.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

The reforms that are ongoing at the Inland Revenue Department and the Customs and Excise Division to improve the administration and collection of taxes will be sustained. My Government is pleased to report that we have seen significant improvement in tax collections as a result of strengthened capacity at IRD and Customs. Our aim is to continue to work towards a modern tax regime of fewer taxes, lower rates, with a broader base and greater voluntary compliance.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

On a whole, efforts to improve integrity in the public service, especially in revenue collecting agencies, remain a top priority. My Government continues to applaud the honest and hardworking public officers, whose integrity and professionalism are beyond reproach. In this vein, my Government calls on those public servants who are not producing to step up and put in an honest day's work for an honest day's pay.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker

While on the subject of public sector reform, my Government remains cognizant of the critical role played by the Public Service in supporting Government's agenda to improve the lives of ordinary Grenadians.

In this regard, my Government reiterates its commitment to reform the public service with the help and support of all key stakeholders to improve productivity and working conditions. My Government has commenced dialogue with the trade unions on a Wage Bill Management Framework to ensure the sustainability of the wage bill going forward. This framework is expected to be completed within the first half of 2017.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker

My Government would like to place on record its appreciation to the trade unions for reaching agreement with Government on the issue of the increments for the period 2014 to 2016 and going forward. We are now waiting to finalise the wage negotiations for 2017 to 2019.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President

My Government is convinced that agriculture is the bedrock of our economy. We have the potential to realize food and nutrition security for our people, while at the same time, contributing significantly to health, employment, income and foreign exchange.

Going forward, the key priorities in this area will include:

- Implementation of the National Agriculture Plan 2030;
- Continuing implementation of the Praedial Larceny Strategy and Action Plan;
- Supporting youth in agriculture;
- Upgrading of farm machinery and equipment;
- Supporting agribusiness development; and,
- Supporting investments in quality and phytosanitary standards to facilitate exports, among other critical interventions.

Mr. President, Mr Speaker

My Government reaffirms its commitment to make Grenada a world-class tourist destination.

Growth in tourism continues to remain high, and holds great promise for further economic expansion and job creation. In this regard, my Government will continue to focus its attention on expanding the room stock, on increasing tourist volume and spending, through marketing, product development and airlift support, especially intra-regionally. A key focus in 2017 will be the commercialisation of several of our major tourism sites, with a view to better management and enhanced visitor experience. Only recently, my Government moved to install security personnel at different sites across the country, so that visitors and citizens alike, can feel even safer.

Through the Citizenship by Investment Programme, my Government will continue to work towards the development of a portfolio of major private sector projects in the tourism sector. Already we have seen the commencement of work on a number of major projects Island wide. Every parish will be positively impacted by the developments in the tourism industry. An outline of those projects will be given in my Government's presentation of the 2017 Budget.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

Investment in infrastructure is critical to support private sector growth. In this regard, Government will invest heavily in roads, bridges, rock fall, landslips, specialized equipment and machinery to support development across economic sectors, such as agriculture, tourism, energy and information communication technology (ICT). At every level, emphasis will be placed on making these investments climate-resilient.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

In addition to the critical investments in education, health, tourism, agriculture and other areas mentioned above, investment in other critical areas such as energy and ICT will be sustained.

Cognizant that the employment needs of all citizens are many and varied, my Government continues to invest in the Small Business Loan programme for the empowerment of our people.

For the year 2016 so far, the Grenada Development Bank has recorded a number of loans that have resulted in significant job creation, as well as the preservation of existing jobs through this programme.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

Without a doubt, pension reform remains perhaps the most significant issue negatively affecting the Public Service. My Government remains firmly committed to finding a collaborative and comprehensive solution to this problem. With this goal in mind, my Government has begun the process of bringing this issue into resolution within an eighteen – twenty four month period.

The first step taken was to seek independent, technical advice from the Caribbean Regional Technical Assistance Centre (CARTAC). The CARTAC Report, which was shared with the public sector unions, is a starting point that has helped us define the problem and outline possible interventions to resolve the issue.

Since receiving the CARTAC's Report, my Government has developed a detailed proposal for a collaborative road map, inclusive of a time bound task force made up of representatives of all public sector unions and the Government and with appropriate technical support from the National Insurance Scheme and other entities.

My Government has shared the road map with the public sector unions and is awaiting their early response to start work.

We wish to assure the Nation that we will continue to press ahead to address this burning issue in the shortest possible time.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

Work continues on the National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) 2030.

As we have said before, this Plan is intended to reflect the dreams, aspirations and hopes of all Grenadians at home and abroad, especially our youth.

It will take into account global mandates, such as the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations. Above all, it will be designed by Grenadians for Grenadians.

The likely benefits include a clear sense of direction, faster development and employment creation, preservation of our heritage and environment, a heightened sense of spirituality and citizens who are equipped to navigate our globalized world.

We remain committed to its development and expect to have the Plan finalized by the end of the third quarter of 2017.

We remain convinced that this Plan should transcend all narrow political interests. We implore all Grenadians to remain on board and take advantage of this unique opportunity to help shape the future of our Country.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

Another Thanksgiving holiday has come and gone. You would recall my announcement that at the level of the Social Partners, it was proposed that the week of October 19 -25 be designated a week of Remembrance. It was also proposed that the week be organized to better reflect the solemnity of this tragic period in our Nation's history, the spectrum of the views across the Nation and the important lessons learned.

It was further agreed that the Committee of Social Partners, led by the Conference of Churches, would propose ways and means for the observance of the week.

Having considered the Proposal, it was felt that further consultation with citizens was needed. Accordingly, we look toward next year to implement any changes to the status quo in respect of the Thanksgiving celebration.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

In the area of safety and security of our citizens and visitors alike, my Government will continue to invest heavily to support the work of the Royal Grenada Police Force. It is imperative for us to maintain Grenada's long-standing image as a safe and secure place to live and visit. My Government is cognizant of the rapidly changing nature of criminal activities and the significant challenges that crime poses to our sustainable development. In this regard, my Government is committed to adequately equipping and training the Royal Grenada Policy Force to face these challenges head on; thereby maintaining peace and order in our Country.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

Grenada was recently invited to assume the chairmanship of the Small States Forum, a grouping of 49 small countries across the world, on the basis of our leadership in advocating small states issues, such as graduation from official development assistance, and securing resources to fight climate change. This prestigious appointment will see Grenada at the helm for the next two years driving the agenda on these critical issues.

My Government notes with pleasure the increased recognition of the vulnerabilities of small states by international financial organizations such as the World Bank, and looks forward to receiving augmented donor support to help our countries build resilience, address inherent

vulnerabilities and break the low growth, high debt, and limited fiscal space spiral affecting our economies.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

My Government remains committed to building strong families and by extension, strong communities and a strong Nation.

We are committed to our philosophy that no one should be left behind.

My Government will continue to support the National Parenting Programme.

With the assistance of the World Bank, my Government has completed the reform of its flagship social assistance programme, Support for Education, Empowerment and Development, (SEED). A new Management Information System (MIS) and a proxy means testing system or targeting tools are now in place. Accordingly, all beneficiaries, existing and potential, will be screened to ensure that only those who are deserving, receive the benefit.

My Government is also pleased to report that it has not only maintained the level of benefits on social safety nets during the life of the Structural Adjustment Programme, but has also expanded it as necessary.

My Government is also pleased to report that the Grand Bacolet Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centre was opened earlier this year and is fully operational. In light of Government's initiative in this area, the Caribbean Development Bank and other governments and international agencies have pledged financial and technical assistance to my Government to further support our goals of providing young offenders with a second chance to make a positive contribution to society.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

In our interactions with our citizens, the issue of housing needs continue to be featured prominently. My Government will expand its support to meet the considerable unmet housing demands of our citizens. Already, all

major housing programmes, including the house repair and the Soft Loan Scheme, have been expanded.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

My Government reaffirms its commitment to the strengthening of our democracy.

The Integrity Commission continues to work to ensure integrity in public life. The recently held Conference entitled “Visionary Leadership in the Management of Anti-Corruption” has been hailed as a tremendous success. We expect to continue to see the tangible results of this noble venture.

The Office of the Ombudsman continues to be a hallmark of our mandate for good governance and accountability within the system, by remaining true to its mandate of addressing public complaints against the State by citizens.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

We have moved one step closer to having a key symbol of democracy restored – our Parliament Building. Construction is well underway and should be completed by the end November 2017. We thank the foreign governments who are helping us on this journey of restoration.

Mr. Speaker, my Government continues to remain committed to the rebuilding of the Governor's General Residence. Another approach has been made to friendly Governments and international agencies to help fund this important historical landmark.

Strengthening National Unity

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

One of the greatest achievements of our Country is the social partnership framework that was established in 2014.

The spirit of patriotism and working together for Grenada has allowed us to embark on several fundamental and far-reaching reforms.

In my Government's view, that partnership has been critical to the success of the Home Grown Structural Adjustment Programme.

Uniting the people of Grenada, at home and abroad, will therefore remain a high priority of my Government.

My Government has already agreed in principle to the continuation and strengthening of this important framework to include the youth and other key stakeholders in the decision-making process of our Country.

Conclusion

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

Our economy is stable and growing and our citizens are beginning to feel the positive effects of this stable growth. The results that we have achieved together in recent years are tremendous, but significant challenges remain. It is imperative that we consolidate those gains and continue to work even closer together to achieve much more.

My Government has reaffirmed its major priorities for this Parliament: **building on the strong foundation of the recent past by investing better and smarter to achieve strong sustainable and inclusive growth, creating job and investment opportunities for our people, and strengthening national unity.**

The details will be expounded when my Government presents the 2017 Budget on December 9, 2016.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Members of Parliament,

May God guide you in all your deliberations and render you equal to the sacred trust bestowed upon you.

May God bless Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique.