



Throne Speech 2005

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

Second Session of the Seventh Parliament

Grenada Trade Centre

March 11th, 2005

Introduction

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, Members of the Senate and the House of Representatives, I greet you all.

On the occasion of the Opening of the Second Session of the Seventh Parliament, my Government renews its commitment to the principles of parliamentary democracy and the rule of law.

Preamble

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, we live in exceptionally challenging times. On September 07, 2004, the physical, economic and social landscape of our beloved Country was dramatically altered by the force and fury of hurricane Ivan. This storm was the sixth most severe in the Caribbean history. Not since hurricane Janet in 1955 had Grenada experienced a direct hit. At the end, a trail of death and destruction remained. Twenty nine (29) lives were lost. The damage is estimated at EC\$2.4 billion. Every Grenadian has been affected.

My Government expresses deepest condolences to the families who lost loved ones and all who suffered loss.

Our 31-year old Country faces unprecedented challenges to rebuild from the ruins. In a world that sometimes takes little notice of small and vulnerable states, my Government expresses its eternal gratitude to the many friendly countries and agencies, which have stood by Grenada in her hour of greatest need.

My Government also recognizes the patriotic pride and fervour, which stirred many of our communities to engage in self-help to re-roof and repair homes. Furthermore, my Government is appreciative of the efforts of the Grenadian diaspora in mobilizing resources for Grenada's recovery and reconstruction.

As we rebuild, my Government remains focused on its vision of a healthy, educated, productive, prosperous and happy Nation. Consistent with this vision, a National Economic Reconstruction and Development Programme is being finalized.

Special attention will be given to stimulating our local economy particularly our productive sectors of Tourism, Agriculture and Light Manufacturing.

Of necessity, there will be considerable emphasis on housing, business reactivation, skills training, psycho-social rehabilitation and institutional strengthening.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, in pursuit of these imperatives, the 2005 Estimates of Expenditure will be laid in the House of Representatives in April of this year.

I now proceed to outline some of the planned interventions of my Government for 2005.

Disaster Management

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, Grenada needs to be better prepared to withstand the impacts of natural disasters. Grenada must also significantly enhance its post-disaster management capability. These are clear lessons from hurricane Ivan.

My Government is committed to reducing Grenada's vulnerability to natural disasters. In this regard, a draft policy on National Hazard Mitigation has already been prepared with assistance from the Caribbean Development Bank. This policy will soon be officially adopted.

Furthermore, a comprehensive review of Grenada's disaster management capabilities is now underway with assistance from the Caribbean Disaster Management Agency (CDERA) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). This will lead to the revamping of the National Emergency Relief Organisation (NERO). My Government will provide extensive training in disaster management for public and private sector institutions as well as district disaster committees.

My Government will also table appropriate legislation to address building codes and other disaster risk reduction mechanisms.

There will be public education programmes on the Building Code to sensitise homeowners and prospective homeowners to appropriate building guidelines and standards. In addition, Government will promote a national retrofitting programme.

Agency for Reconstruction and Development

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, my Government recognizes the need for appropriate institutional arrangements to coordinate the massive task of reconstruction. It cannot be business as usual.

As a consequence, the Agency for Reconstruction and Development Incorporated (ARD) has been established. The ARD is a non-profit company established under the Companies Act of Grenada with the Government of Grenada as the sole shareholder.

The Agency will be responsible for coordinating and leading the implementation of the reconstruction programme. It will work with and through the existing line ministries and

departments of Government. Specifically, it will undertake the following:

- Prepare a Reconstruction and Development Programme for Grenada;
- Mobilise resources for the Reconstruction and Development Programme;
- Coordinate the Reconstruction and Development Programme;
- Negotiate with all donors a set of common approaches to procurement, monitoring, reporting and auditing thereby expediting the process of aid disbursement and reconstruction;
- Monitor and ensure full accountability for the projects and activities under the Reconstruction and Development Programme; and
- Develop a comprehensive communication strategy and programme to disseminate timely and accurate information on the implementation of Grenada's Reconstruction and Development Programme to the Grenadians, friends of Grenada and the donor community.

Mr. Speaker, Madam President, my Government verily believes that the hurricane presents our Country with unique opportunities to build a better and brighter Grenada. For this reason, the Agency for Reconstruction and Development has adopted the slogan "build back better".

The Agency will be launched later this month.

The Grenada Reconstruction and Development Fund

My Government is committed to full accountability and transparency for all financial assistance received for Grenada's Reconstruction and Development Programme.

For this reason, Government intends to enact legislation to establish The Grenada Reconstruction and Development Fund.

The Fund will receive and disburse financial resources for Grenada's Reconstruction and Development Programme and will be managed by the Agency for Reconstruction and Development. This Fund will be subject to independent external audits and will be accountable to Parliament through its Annual Work Programme and Budget and periodic reports.

National Advisory Council for Reconstruction and Development

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, my Government fundamentally believes that every Grenadian regardless of religion, political affiliation and philosophy has an important contribution to make to the rebuilding of our beloved homeland.

In this regard, Cabinet approved the establishment of the National Advisory Council of

Reconstruction and Development – a broad-based group of stakeholders. The Council will promote the extensive participation of civil society stakeholders in prioritization and policy advice in respect of the recovery, reconstruction and development of Grenada. The recommendations of the Council are forwarded to Cabinet. Already, my Government is taking steps to adopt some of the recommendations that emanated from the National Consultation in last December.

Housing

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, my Government regards shelter as a basic need. Furthermore, my Government believes every Grenadian should have this basic need met. In this regard, my Government accords top priority to housing. In 2005, my Government will undertake the following:

- Reconstruct homes for 500 families, whose homes were completely destroyed by the hurricane, through a grant programme;
- Provide materials for 2000 low-income families to repair their homes, through a materials assistance programme;
- Construct homes for 100 middle income families;
- Provide a soft loan facility to 500 families who do not qualify for assistance under the most vulnerable groups;
- Establish new residential communities in six (6) areas to accommodate 500 families. This includes the settlement in Lacalome, St. David's financed by the Government of Venezuela.

The aim of these initiatives is not merely to provide shelter but hurricane-resistant homes. We must build back better!

My Government fully recognizes the need for special institutional arrangements to tackle this massive and urgent challenge of housing. A special unit called the Housing Recovery Unit has been created in the Housing Authority of Grenada. The staff of the Unit will include 12 housing inspectors.

In pursuing its important mandate, the Housing Authority will work closely with the Agency for Reconstruction and Development. However, my Government acknowledges that everyone who is in need of a house cannot be served immediately. Indeed, it takes time to mobilize resources, organize and execute housing programmes. Moreover, new housing developments will require appropriate infrastructure such as roads and utilities. We have to exercise patience.

Agriculture

My Government views the agricultural sector as important pillar of Grenada's economy. The sector is essential as a source of foreign exchange, rural employment and poverty reduction. It is also important for our domestic food security and good nutrition.

Following hurricane Ivan, Government waived the 5% customs service charge on all farmer inputs. Prior to the hurricane, these inputs already received 100% relief on duties and taxes.

In the effort to jump-start the resuscitation of the agricultural sector, Government decided to launch the Agricultural Emergency Resuscitation Programme in November 2004 to provide direct labour support, planting materials and fertilizers to over 3000 farmers.

Unfortunately, some unscrupulous persons submitted claims for persons who did not work. Consequently, Government stopped the programme and instructed that an evaluation be undertaken to rectify the shortcomings.

My Government intends to resume the Agricultural Emergency Resuscitation Programme after the current evaluation is completed.

Given our Country's dependence on surface water for most of our potable water supply, Government will pay special attention to the replanting of forests and watersheds.

Government has sought technical assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat for the resuscitation of the nutmeg industry. The Ministry of Agriculture and the Grenada Cooperative Nutmeg Association will collaborate on a national replanting programme.

Tourism

My Government recognizes the important contribution the tourism sector makes to national development.

"The Spice Lives". This is the slogan of the new marketing campaign that was recently launched by the Grenada Board of Tourism to re-establish Grenada's presence in the major source markets. There will be special promotions to attract visitors to Grenada, the Isle of Spice.

My Government will continue to provide special incentives to our hoteliers to help them recover and reopen in the shortest possible time. It is heartening to note that most of our hoteliers are not simply rebuilding but they are building bigger and better facilities.

Government will also seek to provide access to concessionary financing for the sector.

The recent commissioning of the Melville Street Cruise Ship Terminal signals a new era for cruise tourism in Grenada. Work will continue on the duty free shopping complex and related facilities.

The St. George's Market Square will also be completed for the benefit of both locals and visitors.

Government will continue to upgrade the tourism product. The Grenada Board of Tourism is coordinating a special project called "The Ivan Museum".

In addition, work will continue to upgrade tourist attraction sites.

Business Reactivation

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, my Government will work closely with the private sector to ensure, where necessary, the reactivation of business operations in the shortest possible time.

Already, my Government has provided tax relief on building materials to companies to expedite their recovery. Concessions have also been granted to export-oriented firms to replace capital goods.

In addition, my Government has sought concessionary financing from the Inter-American Development Bank through the Caribbean Development Bank for a private sector credit facility of US\$5-10 million.

A Business Resource Centre at the Grenada Industrial Development Corporation is being established to support business development in Grenada. This project is funded by USAID.

Additionally, USAID is providing support as follows:

- US\$700,000 for Microfinancing Scheme to help small and micro businesses through local institutions;
- US\$2 million in financial grants for the commercial sector to help restore business activities;
- US\$600,000 for export development plans for export-oriented firms;
- US\$700,000 for agribusiness and fisheries.

In an effort to more efficiently serve micro-entrepreneurs, several small and micro-enterprise development funds including the Small Agroprocessors Development Fund and the Micro-Enterprise Programme will be merged.

Human Resource Development

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, our people are our most important resource. My Government regards human resource development as both central and critical to our poverty reduction and national development.

Over the next three years, my Government will embark on a comprehensive schools rehabilitation programme with significant donor support. In the short term, efforts will be made to make the schools habitable for both teachers and children.

The cost to our Nation from the disruption of schools after hurricane Ivan was enormous. In rebuilding our schools, much emphasis will be placed on ensuring they are hurricane-resistant.

Efforts will continue to revise and improve our curricula to ensure its relevance for our reconstruction development needs. Special emphasis will be placed on teacher training particularly in Construction Mathematics, English Language, Reading and Information Communications Technology.

My Government will support the development and expansion of the T. A. Marryshow Community College to ensure its increasing relevance to the needs of our labour market particularly in the post-Ivan era. Special attention will be paid to skills training.

Health Care

My Government will give attention to the reconstruction on the Princess Alice Hospital.

Work will also commence on Phase II of the Hospital Project after the evaluation of Phase I is completed.

Considerable investments will be made to upgrading several health facilities throughout the Country.

The issue of HIV/AIDS will continue to be given top priority with the implementation of the 5-year Strategic Plan.

Training programmes will be offered to health care professionals to improve the quality of service provided.

Pyscho-Social Rehabilitation

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, the task of rebuilding must start in our minds. No rebuilding will be solid and sustainable until we collectively and individually address the deep scars caused

by the passage of hurricane Ivan.

It is therefore essential that we move with alacrity to address the issue of national psycho-rehabilitation. In this regard, the Agency for Reconstruction and Development will coordinate with the Ministry of Social Development and other stakeholders to implement a national programme for psycho-rehabilitation at community and school levels.

Employment Generation

My Government recognises the significant rise in unemployment occasioned by hurricane Ivan. Opportunities are available in the area of construction.

As a consequence, several training programmes will be offered in this area. Special emphasis will be given to our youth and women.

The yachting sub-sector will also provide opportunities for employment and training programmes have already been designed with support from USAID.

My Government has also approached several governments to provide training and job attachments in the hospitality sector.

Information and Communications Technology

My Government will use ICT to improve revenue collection in several government ministries including the Ministry of Agriculture, the Supreme Court Registry and the Ministry of Finance.

The Agency for Reconstruction and Development will provide technical support to develop new economic activities from the use of ICT.

Rehabilitation of Public Buildings

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, many government buildings were significantly damaged by hurricane Ivan. A full programme for the rehabilitation of government buildings has been developed and will be pursued during the year. These include Police Stations, Customs, Audit, District Revenue Offices and Central Medical Stores.

Youth Development

My Government recognizes the pivotal role that our young people must play in national development. A Youth Policy is now in place and will guide the process of youth development in our Country.

Several initiatives will be undertaken to empower our youth. These include skills training and employment, enterprise development, counseling and youth parliament.

Sport Development

My Government will continue to invest in sporting facilities throughout the Country. With the assistance of the People's Republic of China, the National Stadium will be rebuilt in time for the 2007 World Cup.

In addition, several playing fields and sporting facilities throughout the length and breadth of our Country will be upgraded.

The sports scholarships programme will continue to ensure our best athletes are given the opportunity to develop and compete at the highest level.

Carriacou and Petit Martinique Affairs

My Government will continue to invest in the sister islands of Carriacou and Petit Martinique. Investments will include education and sporting facilities, tourist attraction sites and infrastructure.

Environmental Protection

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, protection of the environment and the promotion of sustainable development remains a high priority for my Government.

The passage of hurricane Ivan has dealt a major blow to the environment with 91% of our forest areas and watersheds destroyed. Furthermore, our biodiversity has been considerably eroded.

As a result, my Government will embark on a major reforestation programme. Additionally, I am pleased to note the National Environmental Management Strategy was recently approved. My Government will commence implementing the recommendations of the Strategy immediately.

National Security

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, my Government is fully cognizant of the need to maintain a safe and peaceful country for our citizens, visitors and investors.

My Government will initiate a review of the operations of the Royal Grenada Police Force. The review will include:

1. An examination of the contingency plans in place before hurricane Ivan;
2. An examination of the response of various units and departments to those plans immediately prior to and in the initial aftermath of the passage of hurricane Ivan;
3. Identify strengths and weaknesses; and
4. Make recommendations for corrective measures and future contingency planning.

My Government believes this review is important to restore public confidence in the Royal Grenada Police Force.

Debt Restructuring

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, the passage of hurricane Ivan has occasioned a major slump in government revenues. As a result, Government is now unable to meet its debt obligations as they fall due.

In this regard, my Government has embarked on a debt restructuring programme. In January, legal and financial advisers were recruited to assist with this exercise.

Over time, Grenada will return to a more sustainable debt profile thus ensuring the restoration of our Country's international credit rating.

Legislative Agenda

My Government anticipates a very active year of enacting legislation.

The proposed legislation include:

- The Grenada Reconstruction and Development Fund
- Grenada Authority for the Regulation of Financial Institutions
- Banking
- Securities (Amendment)
- Physical Planning (Amendment)
- Public Finance Management
- Audit

Conclusion

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, Members of Parliament, there is no testimony without a test.

These are testing times for our Nation but we will overcome bearing testimony of our resilience in times of adversity.

Let us unite to rebuild our beloved Nation.

Let us be mindful of the words of our National Anthem “ever conscious of God, we aspire, build and advance as one people”. Let us be inspired by the words of the Holy Bible found in John 16:33 and I quote “in this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world”. End of quote.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, my wife joins me in wishing you, other Members of Parliament, and citizens and friends of Grenada, God’s blessings.

I now declare the Second Session of the Seventh Parliament open.

May God bless us all.