



# **THRONE SPEECH 2015**

**“THE DEFINITION OF A PROSPEROUS NATION”**

**Delivered by**

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**Ceremonial Opening of Parliament**

**Parliamentary Chambers, Government Headquarters**

**Church Street, Basseterre, St. Kitts**

**Thursday, May 14, 2015**

# **INAUGURAL THRONE SPEECH OF THE NEW TEAM UNITY ADMINISTRATION**

**Thursday, May 14, 2015**

**Parliamentary Chambers, Church Street, Basseterre, St. Kitts**

Mr. Speaker and Honourable Members of the National Assembly,

Team Unity was born out of the reality that St. Kitts and Nevis had become a Nation divided by politics. This sad reality of political tribalism failed to create better conditions for our people. Instead, over the past 30 years since Independence, we have seen the steady withdrawal from a unified approach to democracy and development that we promised each other upon gaining Independence in 1983.

Mr. Speaker:

Team Unity on February 16, 2017 received a resounding mandate to change the direction that our Federation was headed and put us on the road to prosperity for all.

Mr. Speaker: Team Unity Is –

Concerned about the social, economic, political and cultural challenges that we face as a Country, and the threats to the well-being and advancement of our people and, therefore determined to resolve these permanently.

Mr. Speaker: Team Unity Is –

Acknowledging the sacrifices made by our forebears in the fight against colonialism, slavery, and racial discrimination and determined to accept, cherish, and recognize the significance of their struggle as the foundation of our sovereign Independence, freedoms and human rights. This is the ethos that drives our resolve to be better.

Mr. Speaker: Team Unity Is –

Recognising, accepting and acknowledging that the values of justice, fairness, openness, tolerance, equality, non-discrimination, and respect for all persons without regard to race, class, gender, ethnicity, language, religion, political opinion, place of our birth are the bedrock of our democracy and good governance.

Mr. Speaker: Team Unity has listened to the people. The laws, policies, and initiatives the Government of National Unity promotes during the new legislative year and beyond will put the people of St. Kitts and Nevis first.

Our Government Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, Heads of Departments, Boards have been directed that in all their decision-making, and whatever they do, to remember that we are working for the People. This Government is for the people and by the people. This must be our focus and will be what defines us.

Mr. Speaker:

Our mandate is to ensure that all have a fair share of this national prosperity.

What is a prosperous nation?

Mr. Speaker: a prosperous nation has a strong vibrant economy where people who want to find a good paying job can find a good paying job. Where someone with an idea can get financing to start a business, where industry small and large is thriving and where access to technology can level the playing field.

Mr. Speaker:

With the fact that tomorrow begins today we are faced with the urgency of now.

An economic overhaul is needed now to ensure we are on the road where all can have access to this Nation's prosperity.

The average citizen does not have to be told that times are hard. The people of St. Kitts and Nevis have faced severe adversity over the past five years. Our Team Unity Government understands that the cost of living is too high. The general standard of living for most citizens has dropped dramatically. While our minimum wage is relatively higher than those of the other OECS territories, unemployment is still too high and the wages of the underemployed are low, resulting in a growing population of the working poor. Our people deserve better.

Local businesses are often overlooked and often undervalued.

The road from poor to middle class was filled with potholes of despair and discouragement. The road was filled with bumps. The road led to disappointment.

Mr. Speaker:

We must put our people to work. We must make the cost of living affordable. We must become energy efficient. We must create the environment where government can be the catalyst for job creation in the private sector through innovation, regulatory processes, technology and incentives. We cannot be satisfied with the past. We must launch St. Kitts and Nevis into the future. This is the foundation of a strong economy.

Team Unity, Mr. Speaker, removed VAT from Food, medicine and funeral expenses effective April 7, 2015 - a compassionate move which has put more money in the pockets of all our people. Many economists agree that tax breaks can jump-start any sluggish economy because people have more money in their pockets.

Team Unity is committed to (a) providing an amnesty on qualified electricity arrears that pre-date the establishment of SKELEC; (b) eliminating the fuel surcharge and thereby reducing the electricity rates for both residents and businesses; (c) reviewing the environmental levy on vehicles; and (d) providing an amnesty on qualified housing arrears and reducing mortgage payments on NHC houses.

Team Unity will increase and expand employment opportunities by partnering with the manufacturing sector to add an additional 150 jobs by the end of 2015, and another 500 by 2020.

Creating incentives for foreign industries to relocate to St. Kitts and Nevis will be a priority for this Government. The attractiveness of our jurisdiction to such corporate relocations includes, but is certainly not limited to, competitive tax holidays, waiver of import duties on the importation of plant and machinery; a highly skilled, trainable and productive labour force; a stable investment climate; rewards for exemplary Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR); and the urgent adoption, by Government, of a pro-business agenda for growth.

Team Unity, Mr. Speaker, has announced new innovative policies aimed at restoring the Citizenship by Investment (CBI) programme. This programme has been one of the pillars of our economy and we have already begun taking steps to ensure its long term sustainability. The first of these measures has been the decision to take on board the 20 recommended reforms which the US-based risk management firm, IPSA International Incorporated, presented to Government in 2014. In addition to these recommended reforms, our Team Unity Government has adopted three additional policies which will further enhance the transformation and long term sustainability of our CBI programme.

Mr. Speaker:

Even as our Team Unity Government sets about the business of restructuring our CBI programme, our Administration is ever mindful of the need to make significant investment in economic repositioning - to guarantee sustainability and diversification in the medium to long term. As such, there is a growing need to seek out those investments that are not dependent on citizenship by investment and far less vulnerable to external shocks. Such investments include more emphasis in research and development; the establishment of centres of excellence for trade, business development, medical and sports tourism, and the arts; and joint ventures with private sector entities engaged in the business of harnessing and marketing intellectual capital.

EC\$16 million dollars, Mr. Speaker, has been allocated as past-due gratuities to former sugar workers without it costing our Federation one cent. This was made possible by a generous grant from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in an effort to settle with our displaced SSMC workers the arrears that was due them since 2005.

Team Unity has already given Nevis EC\$10 million dollars as a jump start to the local economy. Nevis is not an afterthought for our Team Unity Administration, Mr. Speaker. Nevis is a priority.

This Government will create two additional industrial parks on St. Kitts and one on Nevis to accommodate new manufacturing enterprises and expansion of existing plants.

This Government Mr. Speaker will create cyber communities in neighbourhoods within St Kitts and Nevis so small business can have access to the global market place – right from their small shop space in tiny St. Kitts and Nevis.

This Government intends to make energy more affordable through investment in alternative energy sources. This will be done in a number of ways, not limited to the provision of incentives for renewable energy companies to do business in St. Kitts and Nevis. Such companies include those focused on wind, solar and geothermal energy production. In so doing, we will be doing our part saving our planet and restricting our traditional reliance of energy generated by fossil fuels.

Mr. Speaker, just this past weekend the Prime Minister, Dr. the Honourable Timothy Harris attended the Caraĩbe Climate conference with other Caribbean Heads of State hosted by the President of the French Republic. This conference focused on the effects of climate change on the Caribbean. The Prime Minister at the conference stated, and I quote: “We must ensure that the Caribbean Islands, places where people live, work, visit and conduct business every day, are here for generations to come”.

Team Unity will enable and facilitate the ownership of 2000 houses and 3000 lots of land for our residents. This will be one of the catalysts of our building industry which creates jobs and opportunity as well.

It is imperative that we grow our Tourism product on and off peak seasons. Team Unity understands that we need a national brand. There must be a fresh start and approach in telling our story – the story of a Federation at the dawn of a new era of opportunity, prosperity and upward trajectory!

Mr. Speaker:

We know that when people visit our Country they often do not want to leave. We also know that Tourism is one of the pillars of our economy. We will look at new innovative tourism products that will bring people into our destination, so much so that they will become return visitors.

By extension, Mr. Speaker, Team Unity intends to make a fresh start in the areas of Medical Tourism and Sports Tourism – two areas that we consider to be growth sub-sectors.

Team Unity will build capacity by attracting professionals to work for government, and provide to capable businesses government contracts that promote innovation and state-of-the-art services for the people of our Federation.

Team Unity will implement a 30% percent procurement policy that is set aside for Micro, Small and Medium-sized (MSMEs) on Government contracts. This will guarantee the intended goal of levelling the playing field. The establishment of a Tenders Board will also lend transparency and full accountability to this process.

Mr. Speaker:

What is intended is the creation of a new private sector where our people are considered Number #1 at all times.

Team Unity understands that Agricultural Reform is a key facet of our legislative agenda. The Government must establish a bona fide registry for farmers, so they can register and access the fullest incentives and concessions available to them. Government will also expand subsidies and other concessions to farmers and fishers.

Our goal will be business friendly both to local and foreign businesses. Many individuals have ideas that could create jobs right here in St. Kitts and Nevis. Mr. Speaker: Some of the ideas never get out of the mind unless that person receives a helping hand. Sometimes all that is needed is a hand up.

This Government is prepared to initiate a venture capital fund that will give businesses access to start-up monies needed to fund an idea. There would have been no Bill Gates without someone believing in his concept of developing software for computers. This is a new role for our Development Bank to fill, in order to help create a new cadre of budding, promising entrepreneurs.

Mr. Speaker:

These are some of the initiatives designed to turn this economy around, and grow jobs. Our simple approach is to be “people first and business friendly”. It will be one of the cornerstones of this new Government.

Capital projects are central to our economic turnaround. Our Team Unity Government will focus on urban revitalization for Basseterre and Charlestown, including the renovation and rehabilitation of Government buildings; and delivering on our promised Sugar Museum.

Mr. Speaker:

Part of Team Unity's vision for a revived private sector is the creation of a new generation of millionaires who would have invested in tourism culture, the performing and culinary arts, craft production, agro-processing, and other related fields.

Mr. Speaker:

A prosperous Nation is a safe Nation.

St. Kitts and Nevis is a safe place to live, work, visit and conduct business. However, there are some bad apples that will not be allowed to spoil the batch.

Our Team Unity Government has already begun, Mr. Speaker, the work of reducing crime through intervention and prevention. The Government will reduce crime by empowering law enforcement, through new innovative community policing strategies and, at the same time, prevent crime by addressing the socio-economic factors that are at the root of the problem.

A good paying job, Mr. Speaker, is the best social programme one can find. Team Unity will endeavour to create full employment in St. Kitts and Nevis.

This Team Unity Government will, Mr. Speaker, invest in law enforcement by providing better equipment, facilities, appropriate transportation, and facilitate training that is relevant and cutting-edge.

In addition, this Government will invest in greater use of technology and will provide appropriate incentives to the private sector for the acquisition of appropriate technology to facilitate a public/private sector partnership in the fight against crime and violence.

This Government will have a "zero tolerance policy" as it relates to crime and the perpetrators of criminal behaviour.

Acting Commissioner Stafford Liburd announced a very aggressive short term plan to address some of the pressing crime issues facing our Federation. This plan is working Mr. Speaker. As a result of the efforts made by our officers and the community, we have made Mr. Speaker positive steps in addressing crime in our Federation.

Steps have led to increased participation from the public. The Team Unity Government Mr. Speaker is so grateful for bold steps taken by our officers and by the citizens and residents of this great Federation, to keep our neighborhoods safe.

This has led to intelligence regarding drugs entering our ports and arrests have made. We have stopped attempts to smuggle illegal substances into our prisons. Arrests were made in this

instance. Moreover, positive inroads have been made regarding homicides and shootings that will result in the arrest of a number of persons. We will not allow a few bad apples, Mr. Speaker, to spoil the batch.

Mr. Speaker, we are not happy or joyous when we must arrest individuals who decide to choose criminal behavior instead of participating in the prosperity that is being prepared for them. However, our priority is to ensure that everyone is safe in our Federation.

Our police command vehicle is operating around the Island and its use will be expanded. It will be seen in various villages and areas in the Country. It is a mobile police station designed and equipped to assist in keeping our neighbourhoods safe.

Mr. Speaker, we are proud today that CCTV is functioning at 50 to 90 percent operability in some locations and will be fully operable everywhere in thirty days. The Government will ensure the management of CCTV is done differently. When we took office Mr. Speaker, CCTV operability had fallen to 35 percent due to neglect. This will not happen under the Team Unity government. Crime fighting is like a puzzle Mr. Speaker. This piece of the puzzle must fit.

We have done a number of covert operations including increasing the number of officers. Our High Command Mr. Speaker has done walk-throughs in hot spots around the Federation. Mr. Speaker, this will continue.

Mr. Speaker we have some of the best international assistance as well. We have UK consultants with extensive experience in training and intelligence presently in our Federation. They are working closely with our team, as one team, focused on keeping our federation safe.

Mr. Speaker we also know that public safety is not just a police issue. We are fooling ourselves to think it is ONLY the responsibility of the police to keep our Federation safe.

This is why Mr. Speaker we will be instituting the Criminal Justice Strategic Board. This Board will comprise of all stakeholders in the criminal justice system. The Police, The DPP, The prison superintendent, Chamber of Industry and Commerce; representatives of faith-based organisations, the NGO community and Education working as a team to change the culture of crime fighting in our Federation. Mr. Speaker when we walk in UNITY the potential is unlimited.

Mr. Speaker:

Team Unity is committed to saving our young men. Over the last several years the murder rate amongst 18-35 year old men in St. Kitts and Nevis has been alarming. Young men are killing other young men, Mr. Speaker. We must end this. We must end this now. We must save our young men. They are our sons, brothers, husbands and fathers.

This Government will partner with the private sector, churches, fraternal organizations, and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to develop and maintain programmes for at-risk young men. Our teachers need to be trained to be alert and sensitive to behavioural changes in students, particularly in male pupils.

Mr. Speaker:

We must also strengthen our families. The family network is eroding and Government can play a positive role in re-establishing the foundation for strong families. With the economic challenges we face today, parents are working two or three jobs to make ends meet. This Government will lead by example, knowing full well that strong families are the pillars on which this Federation must be built.

This Government will reverse the biggest theft of the future of our people. We will return the land back to the people where it belongs. This Government Mr. Speaker will consider the introduction of flexible time legislation that allows major income earners to spend quality time with their families, including aging parents.

This Government will make health care affordable, including long term care for our seniors. Achieving this will call for an increase in pensions for all pensioners, particularly those on minimum aged-benefits.

Our Team Unity Government will invest in first class education for our young people. Mr. Speaker, this calls for top quality, free pre-school education. We want all of our young people to have a fair share and a fresh start.

Mr. Speaker:

A prosperous Nation is a healthy Nation.

The true character of a Country is how we treat, Mr. Speaker, our children and those who are in the golden years of their lives.

This Government will commission a comprehensive national health insurance plan for all citizens of St. Kitts and Nevis.

This Government will ensure that all persons registered under the Social Security Act will have access to national health insurance benefits, including self-employed persons. Our Government will include children in the national insurance programme via school registration.

This Government must modernize medical record-keeping in order to expedite the delivery of health care to our citizens. The upgrade of the Federation's medical infrastructure also demands that ample attention is paid to top of the line improvements to all of our hospitals and health

centres on St. Kitts and Nevis. Other imperatives include adequate staffing and the bolstering of professionalism and productivity of all of our medical personnel and ancillary workers; improvements in our management of medical supplies, purchasing, laboratories, and maintenance programmes for the physical plants and medical fleet of vehicles.

Mr. Speaker:

By far, one of the major provisions which our Team Unity Government intends to deliver on is the provision of universal health insurance coverage for all of our citizens. Too many of our people are often denied or delayed in terms of the medical care and attention they deserve, simply because of their inability to pay for such services. This has to stop: sponsor sheet fundraisers held to finance the cost of medical care is, very often, a slow process – and almost always fail to cover the full medical bill such patients and their families are obligated to settle.

Mr. Speaker: a prosperous nation is an educated Nation

Since the publication of the White Paper on Education in April 2009, the Federation is still waiting on the passage of the revised Education Act to update the one passed in 2004. To ensure our young people have the best education - and to ensure we have a marketable workforce – our Team Unity government will:

- Ensure swift passage of a revised and relevant Education Reform Act
- Provide free pre-school education
- Ensure the tragedy at Basseterre High School will never happen again
- Implement critical curriculum reform that is designed for skill development; knowledge transfer in technical and vocational areas; and holistic learning for our people, who constitute our Nation's greatest asset.

We will reform the People's Employment Programme (PEP) to ensure that participants are totally empowered for real, gainful employment, entrepreneurship, and self-employment.

Mr. Speaker:

A prosperous nation is one that is the hallmark of good governance and integrity.

Our Team Unity Government is examining the conduct of the General Election of 2015 - and the various election observer reports - and will make timely legislative recommendations regarding the electoral process in our Federation. This will ensure that the gross, unthinkable irregularities surrounding our last General Election will never again be repeated in our Country's history. In addition, we will introduce term limit legislation for the office of Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker:

St. Kitts and Nevis is a young democracy that can be an example of good governance for the region and the world. There exists well-documented proof of the failure of good governance under the past regime. Among the most notorious pieces of evidence are the following:

- Wanton and irresponsible spending at the Sugar Industry Diversification Foundation (SIDF);
- Mismanagement and abuse of our Electoral System; and
- Politicization of our civil service to the point where career professionalism is a rare commodity in many Ministries whose staff are paid to serve the public with taxpayers' hard-earned dollars.

To overcome such blight on our Country's image, and to return us to a state of exemplary governance, several corrective measures have had to be implemented by our Team Unity Government including:

- Investigations into the SIDF and our Electoral Systems;
- Audits of State Entities such as the Office of Constituency Empowerment; and
- Naming of New Boards for all Statutory Corporations.
- Proper Institution of the Public Accounts Committee, in order to improve transparency in Government's financial undertakings.

In addition to the foregoing, our Team Unity Government has already commenced the process of a complete overhaul of government's Information Technology (IT) infrastructure. This major investment would expedite and facilitate government's anticipated migration into a genuine e-government system throughout the entire public sector. This requires public and private sector input and collaboration.

Mr. Speaker:

Our Federation's Foreign Policy is a major concern for our Team Unity Administration. Our intention is the adoption of a multi-polarity approach to foreign relations that stretches beyond our traditional boundaries. As a Nation in transition, it is imperative that we develop friendly relations with progressive jurisdictions as we build new alliances that can reap benefits for the people of our good land.

One key thrust is in the area of South-South co-operation in an effort to cement new friendships with countries in the Southern Hemisphere. We have already secured visa-free entry into Brazil, and are eager to secure similar travel courtesies for our citizens to other emerging markets such as India and South Africa.

In addition, our Team Unity Government understands the value of our immigrant community. Mr. Speaker there is a song that states "No Man is an Island, No Man stands alone; each man's

joy is joy to me; each man's joy is my own". It goes on to say, "we need one another so I will defend each man as my brother, each man is my friend".

With this in my mind, the Team Unity Government Mr. Speaker is prepared to regularize the status of undocumented workers by providing amnesty, within 90 days, for members of the Commonwealth, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. All fees for this current year have to be paid by September 1, 2015. These undocumented workers must not have any criminal record as evidence of good citizenship.

Mr. Speaker, part of the aggressive legislative agenda for the Team Unity Government will include banking legislation and CBI regulations. This will help our financial institutions be proactive in continuing the culture of transparency and accountability.

Mr. Speaker:

The foregoing address encapsulates the vision for our Team Unity Government for the next four and a half years. It constitutes an agenda for growth in which "Prosperity for All" is interwoven in each policy provision, remedial action, or process improvement that is warranted in order to take our Federation forward.

What Team Unity wants is for St. Kitts and Nevis to become the preferred Eastern Caribbean jurisdiction in which to live, work, play and invest – in an atmosphere that is safe, progressive, and investor friendly. St. Kitts and Nevis needs to be a Nation on the move. In overwhelming fashion, the people of this Federation gave Team Unity the mandate to govern its affairs on February 16, 2015. It is a mandate and mission that must be treated with the greatest respect and trust as we seek to operate in the interest of the people of our great Nation.

Mr. Speaker and Honourable Members of the National Assembly:

Other measures of our Team Unity Government will be laid before you as we progress through the legislative calendar of this Honourable House. These and other measures in the Team Unity Manifesto are policies that Team Unity is fully committed to. At this time, I humbly seek God's richest blessings on our entire Country, and His wise counsel upon the debates, discourses, deliberations and decisions emanating from this Honourable House.