



THRONE SPEECH

DELIVERED BY

HIS EXCELLENCY

THE GOVERNOR GENERAL OF ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

SIR CHARLES ANTROBUS, GCMG, OBE

ON

TUESDAY, 17 APRIL 2001

AT

THE FIRST SESSION

OF

THE SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, it gives me great pleasure to address this Honourable House on the occasion of the First Session of the Seventh Parliament.

I wish, Mr. Speaker, to extend warmest congratulations to you on your election to the Office of Speaker of the House of Assembly. I am confident that you will perform your duties with the integrity, dignity and impartiality which are central to the proper function of this high Office.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate all those members who were elected on March 28, 2001, to serve for a five-year term. Congratulations are also in order for the Deputy Speaker and the new Senators.

Mr. Speaker, I heartily extend congratulations to Dr. The Honourable Ralph Gonsalves on his elevation to the esteemed noble office of Prime Minister.

I am sure Mr. Speaker that Dr. Gonsalves' fine qualities, his profound grasp of the human condition in our Caribbean civilization and his deep commitment to the people of this country will serve well in the performance of his duties.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate too, the Honourable Arnhim Eustace on being re-elected and on his appoint to the Officer of Leader of the Opposition. The House will no doubt benefit from his knowledge and experience.

Most of all, Mr. Speaker, I praise the people of our beloved country for their fulsome embrace of competitive democracy in the recent general elections. These elections, it must be pointed out, have been adjudged to be free and fair by all observers locally, regionally and internationally. Our parliamentary democracy is alive and strong, and the transfer of political authority has been smooth and dignified. All this is a wonderful tribute to our Caribbean civilization.

The Prime Minister's passionate call Mr. Speaker, for the healing of the nation after his party's overwhelming victory at the polls has been well received, at home and abroad. In this regard, the apt slogan "Together Now" resonates with the politics of inclusion. My government will ensure in practical ways that no one will be left behind because of his or her political affiliation.

Mr. Speaker, my government recognises that this new century has dawned with unsolved problems of the 20th Century and brand new challenges and opportunities arising from the process of globalisation. Fresh approaches are thus required on all fronts. These demand an admixture of prudence and enterprise; dazzling creativity and solid experience; boldness and caution; science and the spirit of free people; intellectual thought and the folk wisdom of our people; and a genuine affirmation that this nation is founded on the belief in the supremacy of God and the freedom and dignity of man. In pursuing fresh approaches to governance, my government will fully involve all our people. My government welcomes our people's optimism and hopefulness; it eschews defeatism and cynicism. And so, we shall overcome.

Mr. Speaker, in charting a new and better way for the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines,

my Government will practice good governance. It will build a modern, democratic, productive, just and caring society to be enjoyed by all regardless of political affiliation.

Mr. Speaker, it is within that philosophy, framework and vision that my government will focus on the following top ten (10) policies.

- (1) Making job creation, especially quality jobs and sustainable economic development our main priorities;
- (2) Being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime;
- (3) Moving resolutely against corruption in government;
- (4) Building a top-class quality educational system for living and production in the new century;
- (5) Deepening political democracy, strengthening individual rights and freedom and upholding the law and the Constitution;
- (6) Modernising and reforming government to better and more effectively deliver all the services provided by the government.
- (7) Launching a war on poverty, illiteracy, inadequate housing, disease, poor health, and an unhealthy environment.
- (8) Developing as never before in our country, sports, Culture and the arts;
- (9) Strengthening and deepening the process of Caribbean integration, regionally and in the diaspora, in the quest of the further ennoblement and advancement of our Caribbean civilization; and
- (10) Providing honest, committed, creative, responsive and responsible leadership.

Mr. Speaker, the legislative and practical programmes of my government will center on these top ten (10) policies. Lodged within these priorities is the implementation of “The First One Hundred Days Programme” of my government, upon which work has already commenced.

Mr. Speaker, my government is deeply committed to constitutional reform and will shortly be initiating action in this regard.

Prompt steps, too, will be taken Mr. Speaker, to begin a process, which will pave the way for the introduction of genuine, democratic and effective local government.

At the same time, a raft of measures will be adopted to combat official corruption and to provide open, honest government.

My government has pledged Mr. Speaker, that its number one job will be creation of quality jobs for the people of this country. There are immediate and more medium-term proposals which will be implemented to create jobs through the Youth Empowerment Service, the information technology, offshore financial services, tourism, fishing, a reformed agriculture sector, both banana and nonbanana, private construction and the Public sector Investment Programme.

Mr. Speaker, in the pursuit of its programmes of job creation and sustainable development, my government will do all that is within its power to establish the type of investment climate which will attract the necessary capital resources from both local and external sources consistent with our national interest.

My government will embark upon education reform so as to build a top-class quality education system for living and production in this new century.

Mr. Speaker, the health of our people and a clean environment are policy concerns, which are propelling my government into concrete action. In this regard, the improved operation of the Milton Cato Memorial Hospital, the fight against HIV/AIDS, the care of the aged and children, and the collection and disposal of solid waste will be among my government's central focuses.

Our nation's social infrastructure is in dire need of overhaul, Mr. Speaker. My government plans to shift the policy emphasis from traditional social welfarism to one of social development. The empowerment of the family through selfsustaining measures as distinct from temporary handouts is at the core of my government's approach to the alleviation of poverty. This matter is not only one of social upliftment; it connects, too, as a national security issue of the first order.

My government pledges, Mr. Speaker, to put programmes in place to advance the cause of sports, culture and the arts and to ensure that sports persons and cultural workers are fully appreciated in practical terms.

The physical infrastructure of our country, Mr. Speaker, especially the road network, has been allowed to deteriorate markedly. Accordingly, my government will act swiftly to improve the situation in this regard, so too, will it act on the matter of Airport Development.

My government makes it absolutely clear Mr. Speaker that its primary obligation is to ensure that national security and law and order are maintained and promoted. Thus drug traffickers and assorted criminal offenders will receive no respite from my government. My government, I repeat, will be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime.

My government gives the assurance Mr. Speaker that it will continue to build relations with all peace-loving, law-abiding nations internationally including all those states with which our country currently has diplomatic relations. St. Vincent and the Grenadines will shoulder its

international obligations to the best of its ability. And my government in its foreign policy will always promote the interest of our people, at home and abroad.

The commitment of my government Mr. Speaker, to the deepening of the process of regional integration is already well known. A central element of my government's overall vision is the further ennoblement and advancement of our Caribbean civilization in all its dimensions. On this matter, my government is unwavering.

My government fully recognises Mr. Speaker, that expectations are very high in our country. This inevitably happens whenever there is a change of government, particularly one, which has been ushered in with such an overwhelming majority. However, the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines are politically sophisticated and wise. They know that "Rome was not built in a day". Still, my government will be moving swiftly, as indeed it already has been, to address adequately the concerns of the people in communion with them.

Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that this Parliament, composed as it is with such an array of talents and experience, will certainly rise to the challenge which lies before us for the successful development of our beloved nation state.

Mr. Speaker, I pray God's guidance on all future deliberations of this Honourable

House and take great pleasure in declaring open this the First Session of the Seventh Parliament.