



**CEREMONIAL OPENING OF PARLIAMENT**

**MONDAY 2<sup>ND</sup> DECEMBER, 2002**

**THRONE SPEECH**

**DELIVERED BY**

**HIS EXCELLENCY SIR FREDERICK BALLANTYNE, GCMG**

**GOVERNOR GENERAL**

**AT**

**THE THIRD SESSION OF THE**

**SEVENTH PARLIAMENT**

**HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**KINGSTOWN**

**ST. VINCENT**

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of the House of Assembly, it is an honour and privilege for me to address this Honourable House on this occasion for the first time. All of my predecessors have been persons of distinction and I will certainly try to live up to the expectations of this high and noble office.

Mr. Speaker, despite the sharp downturn in the international economy occasioned by the terrorist attack of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 and the damage caused by the passage of Tropical Storm Lilli this year, our economy has remained stable due to the enterprise of our people and to careful management and targeted strategic interventions by the Government. Despite the adversities which we faced, our national spirit soared. This was evident during the celebrations to mark the 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of our nation's independence. Vincentians went about their lives in a peaceful, patriotic and dignified manner. Mr. Speaker, we are by and large, a people of remarkable understanding and discipline.

Mr. Speaker, in keeping with its policy of good governance and consultation with civil society and social partners, my government held consultations on the 2003 budget throughout the country. Indeed, this is a first in our thriving democracy. Unlike any other time in our history, the ordinary man and woman have had an opportunity to participate in the process of budget making. These consultations have been most productive in every respect.

Mr. Speaker, education and poverty alleviation remain top priorities of my government. Mr. Speaker, my government is of the unshakable belief that a sound education is a guaranteed escape from the clutches of poverty. Mr. Speaker, my government is of the view that education, like health care, should be accessible to all, regardless of class, colour or creed. As my government launches a frontal assault on poverty it seeks to make education the central weapon. My government is pursuing an educational policy for living and production.

Mr. Speaker, in order to enhance the quality of education and make it accessible to all, my government intends to do the following in the new year:-

1. Increase the number of secondary school places to accommodate 500 more students from the common entrance class;
2. Improve the pass rates of the National Examinations;
3. Initiate the process to grant Associate Degrees and Certificate Programmes at the Community College;
4. Conduct a study to determine the volume and types of special needs which exist in the state;
5. Develop an Information Technology Curriculum and establish a National Grid for learning;
6. Provide support for all registered pre-schools;
7. Implement the National Sports Policy;
8. Institutionalize a joint Management Development Programme for all Principals and Ministry Officials;
9. Strengthen the Ministry of Education; and
10. Provide more training opportunities at universities and colleges overseas.

Mr. Speaker, my government has taken a special interest in and responsibility for the elderly, the neglected and the homeless. In keeping with its long-held philosophy of every man being his brother's keeper, my government, through the Public Assistance Programme and other schemes, has tried to lessen the burdens of the disadvantaged. Moreover, my government's all embracing poverty eradication strategy is focused on the empowerment of the poor in very practical ways for their self-sustaining development.

Mr. Speaker, it is my government's intention to build a long overdue Crisis Centre for the victims of domestic violence. This centre will provide temporary refuge for the victims of spousal and child abuse. My government has already sought assistance from the social partners to work towards this end.

Mr. Speaker, after the presentation of its report in Geneva on the Rights of the Child earlier this year, my government has embarked on several of the recommendations which were made. Chief among these is

the reform and harmonization of legislation relating to children and families. In the coming year, the reform will commence and will be done in conjunction with the OECS and UNICEF.

Mr. Speaker, my government will continue its reform in the Offshore Sector with the formal separation of the marketing and supervisory roles of the Authority in keeping with international practices.

Mr. Speaker, my government will be more aggressive in its marketing strategy and in the new thrust, the Authority will focus on mutual funds and insurances, in addition to International Business Companies (IBCs).

Further, Mr. Speaker, one of our principal objectives for the coming year will be to remove St. Vincent and Grenadines from the Financial Action Task Force Black List. In the past, this has seriously affected our credibility in the international arena.

Mr. Speaker, given the number of adversities experienced by the Agricultural Sector, including the passage of Tropical Storm Lilli a few short months ago, my government will intensify its Agricultural Diversification Programme through the following among other things:

1. The revitalization of the Arrowroot Industry;
2. Poultry and other livestock development;
3. Building a cassava processing plant; and
4. Completion of a coconut water bottling facility.

Mr. Speaker, my government also hopes to complete the restructuring of the banana industry to make it more competitive and modern.

Mr. Speaker, my government also intends, in the new year, to make St. Vincent and the Grenadines compliant with WTO requirements on Sanitary and phytosanitary standards. We are cognizant of the fact that proper practices and procedures must be followed if we are to compete internationally.

Mr. Speaker, in the Fisheries Sector, my government will move swiftly to train fisherfolk and complete the construction of facilities to make it possible for St. Vincent and the Grenadines to resume the exportation of fish to the European Union. My government will also concentrate heavily on Forestry and the Environment so that harmful practices which damage the environment can be arrested.

Mr. Speaker, in its quest to meet challenges arising from advances in information technology, my government has established a National Institute of Technology. In the coming year, my government will introduce, in practical terms, e-government. We will establish the infrastructure for a new government website, intranet and a new PBX system.

Mr. Speaker, my government has also liberalized the telecommunications market and in the new year Vincentians will be given a choice of telecommunication providers. Licenses for the new entities have already been issued.

Mr. Speaker, tourism remains a priority sector for my government. St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a unique product in that we offer several destinations in one package. It is for this reason that my government has declared this country a regional and international conference venue. Since my government took office, it has successfully hosted several regional and international conferences. Nevertheless, greater emphasis needs to be put on product development. To this end, my government intends to pass the Tourism Standards Act and accompanying regulations which will not only focus on hotels, but also make provision for a system of licensing all persons involved in the industry. Further, in order for us to capture the attention of regional and international tourism investors, my government is actively developing a tourism industry incentive legislation which will cover the wide spectrum of hospitality services.

Mr. Speaker, to address the persistent problem of harassment of and petty crimes against visitors, my government has established a Tourist Police Unit.

Mr. Speaker, my government has already developed a National Tourism Strategic Plan for the period of 2002 - 2006. This plan, which will be used to guide tourism development in the coming period, has identified five market areas for concentration. They are:

1. Sailing and Yachting;
2. Diving;
3. Weddings and Honeymoons;
4. Nature Tourism; and
5. Festivals.

In the coming year an action plan will be prepared for each sub-sector.

Mr. Speaker, in 2003, my government intends to hire a new public relations firm to promote St. Vincent and the Grenadines in the USA, Canada and Europe.

Mr. Speaker, my government has embarked on the process of Constitutional Reform. The Constitutional Reform Commission, which was recently established by Parliament, will begin its work in earnest in January 2003. The Commission which is headed by former law professor, Dr. Nicholas Liverpool as Chairman and Mr. Parnell Campbell, Q.C., as Deputy Chairman, is made up of twenty-five persons representing a wide cross section of Vincentian society. The process will be ongoing and will also include consultations with the Vincentian diaspora. Vincentians will soon have the opportunity to fashion their own constitution.

Mr. Speaker, measures are being taken to address this country's number one security problem, the prison, for which a new site has been identified. The building of a new correctional facility will not only relieve the existing overcrowding but also provide facilities for the delivery of programmes to aid in the rehabilitation of inmates. Mr. Speaker, my government will continue to be tough on crime and the causes of crime. We have thus far established the Rapid Response Unit, the White Collar Crime Unit and now the Police Oversight Body headed by Mr. Carlyle Dougan, Q.C.

Mr. Speaker, my government continues to place heavy emphasis on infrastructural development. Funds to be realized from the European Union, the Caribbean Development Bank, The Republic of China on Taiwan and the Kuwaiti Fund, as well as locally generated funds will in 2003 be spent on the following major projects:

- i. The Windward Highway;
- ii. The Feeder Roads Programme;
- iii. The Labour Intensive Road Maintenance Programme;
- iv. The Cross Country Road;
- v. The Customs and Excise Building Rehabilitation Project;
- vi. Rehabilitation of the Ministerial Building;
- vii. Rehabilitation of Clinics and Police Stations;
- viii. The construction of four multi-purpose centres;
- ix. Rehabilitation of the E.T. Joshua Airport;
- x. The National Public Library.

Mr. Speaker, my government will continue to introduce measures to improve the quality and accessibility of health care. We are happy to report that a fully staffed HIV/AIDS Unit with the necessary support network has been established.

Mr. Speaker, also in the new year, my government will complete Phase Three of the Milton Cato Memorial Hospital, which includes the Administrative Block and Records Room. The five year Health

Sector Plan is also expected to be completed by the end of the year. Meanwhile implementation of its vital elements is ongoing.

Mr. Speaker, my government will enhance its immunization programme with the introduction of a pentavalent vaccine - a single vaccine which will provide protection against five different diseases.

Mr. Speaker, given the current high demand for nurses, my government intends to train up to one hundred nurses yearly.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of culture, the new measures and policies of my government have led to a cultural rebirth in the country. The spirit of patriotism is also flourishing. Vincentians now show greater respect for their national flag and institutions. Mr. Speaker, in the new year my government intends to launch its National Cultural Policy which will provide many opportunities for the creative expressions of our cultural artistes.

Mr. Speaker, my government continues to be pragmatic, principled and visionary in its approach to foreign policy which focuses first and foremost on the national interest of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. But St. Vincent and the Grenadines also takes its regional and international obligations seriously. St. Vincent and the Grenadines will support all measures, be they regional or international, geared towards the attainment of international peace and security. More specifically, my government will continue to endorse all United Nations Resolutions against the global menace of terrorism. My government has commenced the process of restructuring the Ministry of Foreign Affairs so as to respond effectively to the global architecture.

Mr. Speaker, my government continues to carry out its heavy legislative agenda because it is a government of laws, not of men.

Mr. Speaker, over forty pieces of legislation were passed covering areas such as immigration, copyright, customs, civil aviation, commissions of inquiry, financial intelligence, energy, terrorism and intellectual property.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Justice is faced with the challenge of ensuring the efficient and expedient administration of justice. To this end, it is imperative that all related institutions be adequately staffed and housed. My government is therefore committed to finding a new home for the Registry and recruiting staff to fill existing vacancies in the Magistracy, the Attorney General's Office and the Office of the Direction of Public Prosecutions.

Mr. Speaker, my government's scientific approach to business and its harnessing of all the nation's talents will certainly result in a better St. Vincent and the Grenadines for us all.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of the House of Assembly, it is with confidence that I now declare open the Third Session of the Seventh Parliament.