



**CEREMONIAL OPENING OF PARLIAMENT**

**WEDNESDAY, 29 DECEMBER 2010**

**THRONE SPEECH**

**DELIVERED BY**

**HIS EXCELLENCY SIR FREDERICK BALLANTYNE, GCMG**

**GOVERNOR GENERAL**

**AT**

**THE FIFTH SESSION**

**OF**

**THE EIGHTH PARLIAMENT**

**HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**KINGSTOWN**

**ST. VINCENT**

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

I congratulate all the Representatives who were recently elected on December 13, 2010. I congratulate, too, the six Senators who have been appointed to this Honourable House. I welcome you all, especially the fresh faces, to this august body.

Mr. Speaker, in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, between 1956, when the ministerial system of government was introduced, and up to the recent 2010 general elections, only two political leaders ever led their political parties to three successive electoral triumphs. These two distinguished leaders were Ebenezer Joshua whose party won in 1957, 1961, and 1966, for an abbreviated third term, and Sir James Mitchell whose party emerged victorious in 1984, 1989, 1994 and then for a shortened term after the 1998 general elections. Robert Milton Cato's St. Vincent and the Grenadines Labour Party won three elections (1967, 1974, and 1979) but they were not successive victories. Our current Prime Minister, Dr. The Honourable Ralph E. Gonsalves, has joined that elite company by leading his party to victory in the 2001, 2005, and 2010 general elections. I recognise this accomplishment and heartily congratulate the Honourable Prime Minister and his Unity Labour Party. The Prime Minister is now the longest serving representative in the current Parliament. He has been here since February 1994, a span of 16 years, through five general elections.

Mr. Speaker, congratulations, are also in order for the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for leading his party, the New Democratic Party, in a close electoral contest. In the process his party won an additional four seats to bolster the other three seats which it held hitherto.

I acknowledge the contribution of the other candidates in the recently-held general elections. I commend the Supervisor of Elections, Mrs. Sylvia Findlay-Scrubb, and her staff for their excellent management of the elections. I thank the Election Observers from overseas – those from CARICOM, the Organisation of American States (OAS), and the Commonwealth – and those locally, spearheaded by the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Christian Council. It was most pleasing to hear from the overseas Observers that the general elections were free, fair, inclusive, and transparent and that they had been held in accordance with high international standards. Our country continues to be a beacon of democracy.

There are nevertheless five aspects of the general elections which I personally found to be troubling. First, the excess of personal abuse and vilification from the platforms. I shall speak more on this later. Secondly, the disregard of the law and people's sensitivities in the abuse of the right to broadcast over public address systems mounted on moving vehicles. I was at a funeral service at the Methodist Church in Kingstown and a political party had its loudspeakers on vehicles blaring almost incessantly up and down Back Street to the annoyance of those at the funeral service. Thirdly, the defacing of private and public property with posters and painted markings. Surely, this is unacceptable in modern St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Fourthly, the instances, albeit few, of politically-motivated violence. This has no place in our democratic politics. Fifthly, the huge sums of money spent in the elections by the political parties and their supporters. Parliament ought to act swiftly and reasonably in addressing these matters.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, it is my view that the fresh and unambiguous mandate given by the electorate to the governing party and the increased support accorded to the parliamentary opposition, point to the necessity and desirability of both sides working constructively together in the nation's interest. Healing, reconciliation, and nation-building should be among our major goals.

My government is most sensitive to the issues of healing and reconciliation consequent upon the recent bruising and divisive general elections. Truth and honesty are essential pre-conditions for healing and reconciliation. Defamation, unseemly personal attacks, character assassination, and the trafficking in falsehoods will undermine any serious effort at healing and reconciliation. Thus, they ought to be avoided. We must cast aside the personal vanities, narrow personal agendas and petty political bickering. We must focus more on the wide range of matters upon which there is, or can be, consensus. I acknowledge that competitive political democracy allows for a certain robustness of language but I believe that most reasonable citizens are likely to concur with the view that personal vilification has gone way beyond any accepted limits. Indeed, some political speeches and some rants on talk-radio have been nothing but malicious, verbal abuse and defamation of character. We must stop it.

This is a small country in which our people ought to live more lovingly with one another. We must all make a better effort henceforth so to do. Parliamentarians have a vital role to play in this regard. To be sure, the church, the school, the family, the mass media, and the community organisation also have their critical contribution to make. But I am talking to Parliamentarians today; so, I focus on Honourable Members.

My government has established a Ministry of National Reconciliation headed by someone who has exquisite credentials as a worker in the pastoral vineyard. This Ministry provides a focal point for such work. Interestingly, one of the subjects in that Honourable Minister's range of portfolios is that of "ecclesiastical affairs". I am sure that he would engage with the churches and the Ministry of Social Development, among others, to assist in the realisation of healing and reconciliation.

Mr. Speaker, my government intends to pursue vigorously its Top Ten Policies upon which the Unity Labour Party was recently re-elected. These are:

Waging the on-going War against Poverty;

Wealth Creation and Job Creation through the private, State and cooperative economic sectors.

Pursuing a many-sided strategy of sustainable economic growth and development in an increasingly modern and globalised environment, including the consolidating of fiscal discipline, balancing prudence and enterprise;

Extending and deepening the Education Revolution, including a further emphasis on ICT training and the implementation of the one laptop per student policy;

Making St. Vincent and the Grenadines safer and strengthening law and order;

Enhancing the Health and Wellness Revolution, including the opening of the Modern Medical Complex at Georgetown and the relocation of the main hospital;

Uplifting the communities by properly addressing the vital areas of concern, including housing, lands, road repairs, sports and cultural facilities;

Elaborate plans for the building of a new city at Arnos Vale and enhanced access to Kingstown;

Completing the Argyle International Airport and improving markedly connectivity in every way between St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the world.

Delivering top-notch good governance all round, in every area of public policy, including regional integration and international relations in our people's interest.

All of these policies will be implemented within the context, too, of the immediate on-going "Operation Recovery and Reconstruction" in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Operation Recovery and Reconstruction is proceeding well but there is still much more work to be done. It has been an expensive exercise thus far and much more resources are still to be expended on it particularly as regards agricultural restoration and development, housing reconstruction, the rehabilitation of roads and buildings, the restoration of the badly-damaged forests, and the protection of our rivers and coastline which has been severely compromised.

Mr. Speaker, my government's Top Ten Policies, and others, plus Operation Recovery and Reconstruction demand significant resources. Some resources have already been mobilised but they are insufficient for all the major tasks ahead. My government is in the process of accessing additional resources from grants and soft loans. But most important is the sustainable development of the economy to enable the creation of more wealth and jobs so as to generate further domestic resources for more infrastructural and social development. In this venture of economic development the public, private, and cooperative sectors must work collaboratively for nation-building. Enhanced production and better and more productive attitudes to work are essential. Workers, supervisors, and managers must lift their game in this exercise. Uncompetitive production of goods and services will get us nowhere; poor quality work will doom us.

Next month, my government will detail its precise revenue and expenditure plans for 2011, and beyond, when the Honourable Prime Minister presents the Annual Estimates and the Appropriation Bill to this Honourable House.

Mr. Speaker, the ongoing international economic recession still affects St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and the Caribbean, adversely. This fact behooves us to be more creative in our efforts and intolerant of wasting resources than ever before. These considerations apply with equal force in the private sector, the public service, and in public enterprises. Public Servants and workers in public enterprises must pull

their weight more than ever. Owning the government means, among other things, working harder and smarter for the collective good of the nation. Owning the government cannot mean fleecing the government, directly or indirectly. The government belongs to all of us, today and tomorrow; so, we must all try to make it better. This is a responsibility which we must not shirk.

I pray that our people, as a whole, at home and abroad would put partisan political differences behind them and embrace the new period with enthusiasm, resilience, and resourcefulness. We are, by and large, a good-natured people who love our neighbours and our country. A tiny minority may go astray but the bulk of us mean well and want to do well for ourselves, our families, and our country. Let us harness this positive impulse for a better future.

The young people especially have an overwhelming stake in this country and its future. Educational and legitimate opportunities in the economy and society abound as never before. Among the central emphases of my government have been education and training, job creation and wealth creation, health and wellness, historical reclamation and cultural upliftment. These emphases touch and concern the young people in major ways. I urge young persons to seize the abundant legitimate opportunities available for their advancement. Please, stay away from the tainted glitter of crime especially those related to violence, drug trafficking, and money-laundering. Easy money invariably means big jail. I urge all to hold on to the core values of our forbears who have built this country: Hard and smart work, education and training, family, thrift, community solidarity, good neighborliness, love of country, Christian ethics, individual freedom, human dignity, and democracy. With an on-going and practical commitment to these core values, it is unlikely that we can ever go wrong. My government holds steadfast to these values.

Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to declare the commencement of the First Session of the Ninth Parliament of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Thank you! And may Almighty God continue to bless us all!