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HIS EXCELLENCY  
THE GOVERNOR GENERAL OF ST. VINCENT AND THE  
GRENADINES

**SIR FREDERICK BALLANTYNE, G.C.M.G.**

ON

MONDAY, JANUARY 09, 2012

AT

THE SECOND SESSION

OF

THE NINTH PARLIAMENT

*The House of Assembly  
Kingstown  
St. Vincent and the Grenadines*

*January 09, 2012*

**THRONE SPEECH**  
**Delivered by His Excellency Sir Frederick Ballantyne, GCMG, MD**  
**At the Second Session of the Ninth Parliament**  
**Monday, January 09, 2012**

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Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, it is a privilege for me to open the Second Session of the Ninth Parliament and to wish you the very best for the New Year.

Since September 2008, and continuing, the world and our region have faced an awesome financial and economic catastrophe. In response, my government moved swiftly and assertively, applying hard and smart work, prudent and enterprising fiscal policies, sheer determination and creative management, including the efficacious use of our hard-won sovereignty and independence, to fashion the right conditions for Vincentians to meet the challenges of this global recession.

2010 and 2011 were very difficult years, with significant devastation caused to the agricultural sector and coastal ecosystems by the natural elements. In early 2010 there was a severe drought; in October 2010, a terrible hurricane;

**and** in April 2011, crippling flash floods in the north-east of St. Vincent. Despite several setbacks, our tiny island was not derailed, and, towards the end of 2011 our economy saw slow recovery.

We are all aware that my Government has remained firmly committed to preserving and bolstering our fragile economy and, for this, deserves the commendation of all citizens. Our experiences during the last three years serve to remind us that as citizens, we must become even more patriotic and express this in improved productivity and higher levels of commitment to family, work and nation. To this end, we must capitalise on educational opportunities that provide us with the springboard for our development and growth.

Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, my Government will continue to pursue an aggressive policy to address the socio-economic needs of all citizens, with developments in health, education, housing, and physical infrastructure, playing important roles in the thrust to reduce poverty and improve the standard of living of all citizens. Further, the continued threat of natural disasters and the devastating effects of climate change have caused my government to implement the National Building Regulations to ensure a

much stronger and durable building stock and to put in place Disaster Mitigation Measures to prevent the extent of the damage and loss to property and infrastructure experienced in the past.

Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, my Government recognises that the catalyst for the development of the nation's human resource capital is through education, and through timely interventions by the Ministry of Education, further provisions are being made for access to early childhood education, enhanced quality teaching, improved administration, inspection and management of the sector. The emergence of the knowledge society and economy encourages people to pursue post secondary and tertiary education and gives opportunities for them to find rewarding and meaningful employment in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, regionally, and globally.

My Government's implementation of the one lap top per student initiative and the expansion of connectivity to make internet more accessible, serve to re-position the education system to become more creative and innovative while strengthening the capacity of school leavers to access education from cross-border providers through e-learning, thereby reducing the cost of education significantly.

There is no doubt in my mind, Mr. Speaker that the new and revolutionary developments in telecommunications have contributed significantly to the advancement of education, training, teaching and learning.

Mr. Speaker, education, however, has to move away from being compartmentalised in level and function and assume more markedly a whole sector or multi sectoral approach in achieving education goals. My Government has, therefore, provided learning hubs in the Learning Resources Centres for adult learners, including farmers. Life long learning for farmers is critical and urgent as we apply ourselves to improving the material circumstances of persons involved in this sector and, by extension, rural communities and ultimately the income- generating capacity of this country.

The Agricultural Training Institute which will be in operation in 2012 is critical for much needed training for farmers, farm workers and extension officers, to strengthen institutional capacity in the area of the scientific application of knowledge, including the growing of tissue cultures and the provision of expertise to farmers in the thrust to diversify agriculture and

provide food security. Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, by way of supplying the needed assistance to the Agricultural Sector, my Government is fully committed to providing vocational based-teaching for persons in this sector. My Government is also in the process of exploring new markets for the exportation of agricultural produce particularly in South America. Continued emphasis will be placed on the rehabilitation of farms and the thrust to diversify. To this end, significant emphasis will be placed on providing an enabling environment for the cocoa project in 2012.

Despite the many challenges, my Government has redoubled its efforts to create a commercially viable fishing industry while ensuring the sustainability of fisheries resources. Efforts are ongoing to develop the fishing fleet through a six million dollar programme, improve the standards for marketing of fish and fish products and develop value-added products.

My Government will continue its capacity-building initiatives within the fisheries sector. An initiative to restructure the management at all fisheries centres is ongoing and is designed to improve efficiency of operations and access to regional and international markets.

Mr. Speaker, with the ravages to the fragile Agricultural Sector, my Government has identified the Tourism Sector as a developmental priority since it has the potential to transform the economy and provide quality jobs. The Industry showed a 2.5% increase in stay-over visitors and 7.4% increase in yacht visitors for the period January to November 2011, as compared to the same period in 2010. In light of my Government's thrust, the Ministry will continue to boost public relations campaigns at home and abroad and work with other Ministries to enhance the appeal of the tourism product.

Efforts will continue to bolster the industry by introducing and implementing tourism service standards. The proposed Maritime and Hospitality Institute will be an essential component of this as it will offer training to our citizens which will enable them to provide top-quality service while working and earning in these sectors.

In an uncertain global environment, my Government will continue to implement a principled foreign policy by pursuing traditional, and forming new, strategic alliances to advance our nation's interest. This is an opportune time for us to formally recognise and express gratitude to our longtime allies, including the European Union, the USA, Canada, Cuba, the

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Republic of China on Taiwan and Brazil and our CARICOM neighbours.

Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, my Government understands the importance of securing foreign investments, and through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Commerce, will establish an Embassy in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, given the tremendous opportunities which can be derived from strengthening bilateral relations between St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Venezuela along with other countries in Latin America. This mission will enhance the relations at the political, economic, trading, and technical levels. Of significance is that it will facilitate diplomatic mechanisms for trade in goods and services, particularly as our country moves towards the completion of the Argyle International Airport. Additionally, St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a member of ALBA, headquartered in Caracas and our national interests will be better served by establishing a real presence in Caracas.

Moreover, the sixty Vincentian students currently studying in universities throughout Venezuela will benefit from direct representation at the consular and diplomatic level.

Mr. Speaker, my Government will also continue to encourage targeted foreign investment and to promote the free trade agreements through the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) by 2012. This initiative will require our people to increase productivity and become more competitive to face the challenges of the global recession. This will be a launching pad to strengthen growth and innovation. The EPA Implementation Unit has been established under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and is tasked with leading this process.

Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, our small nation will only register real growth if it is a healthy nation. My Government will therefore continue to implement its policy of universal health care. The further modernisation of the public health care sector is aimed at providing access to affordable, equitable, quality and culturally acceptable health care. This will be achieved, in part, through the significant input of the European Union, which has provided the funding for a more advanced and decentralized health service. There will be greater emphasis on highly specialized diagnostic services.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines' natural environment shapes our national identity, our health and our prosperity. The regulatory and environmental assessment of marine areas, forestry, protected areas and water courses will continue to be addressed to protect our environment. Clean energy projects will be welcomed and an on-going drive of reforestation will be implemented.

Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, our physical infrastructure was not spared terrible damage during 2010 and 2011. In 2012, the Ministry of Transport, Works, Urban Development and Local Government will improve the response mechanism for the rehabilitation of roads and bridges. Coastal defences, river defences, emergency shelters and feeder roads will be developed and upgraded.

City Kingstown is taking on a new face and plans are well advanced for the clean up of the city and the restoration of the Botanical Gardens.

I am, however, appealing to citizens to stop defacing public and private property. In particular, please use the Heritage Square for the cultural purpose for which it is intended.

Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members, my Government has a fundamental duty to protect our citizens and to defend them against any threats of national security. It is my Government's belief that the interests of law-abiding citizens should be placed ahead of those of criminals, and every effort will be made to deter criminal activity in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

My Government, therefore, places great emphasis on its policies and programmes on matters of security, law, order and justice. It is anticipated that significant pieces of legislation will be prepared in 2012. In the area of Criminal Law Legislation, supporting infrastructure will be put in place for the more efficient disposal of criminal cases. Reform of Criminal Law and practice continues, balancing individual rights and the protection of the community from crime.

To strengthen law and order in the Government's good governance platform and to continue to be tough on crime and the causes of crime, new Police, Prisons and Road Trafficking Bills will be drafted. Section 4 of the Financial Intelligence Unit Act will be amended to enhance the functions of the Financial Intelligence Unit.

A draft Bill for the integration of the Magistracy will be reviewed, as well as Legislation to support speedier trials in the Magistracy and the High Court, thereby ensuring that there is a veritable permanent criminal Division of the High Court.

The Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court Magistrates Agreement 2011 was signed by the Heads of Government in May 2011. Legislation to give effect to the said Agreement and the Protocols for the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court between the Governments of the Member States and the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court will be tabled for enactment in the House.

To ensure that supporting infrastructure is in place for the implementation of the OECS Electronic Government for Regional Integration Project (EGRIP) Legislation, the following Bills will be tabled:

- Data Protection Bill
- Electronic Crimes Bill
- Electronic Evidence Bill
- Electronic Funds Transfer Bill

- Electronic Transactions Bill
- Electronic Filing Bill

Mr. Speaker, my Government will continue to empower the family, to strengthen the bonds of solidarity, and to uplift it. We will complete the process of adopting the first four (4) pieces of completed harmonised Model Family Legislation, two of which have already been enacted into law – the Care and Adoption Act and the Status of Children Act. The other two remaining pieces of Legislation – The Domestic Violence Bill and the Child Justice Bill – are scheduled to be introduced in the first half of 2012.

The Modern Legal Professional Bill will be enacted to regulate, monitor and foster development of the legal profession.

In Agriculture, legislation will be crafted to strengthen agricultural development in several areas. Among these items of legislation will be a review of the Cocoa Cess Act, Cap. 51, which provides payment of two cents on every pound of cocoa beans exported.

Mr. Speaker, the broadcasting industry is a highly profitable industry and a powerful means of effecting cultural change. A draft Bill setting out a systematic approach to ensure the regulation and supervision of the industry will be introduced in the House this year without in any way limiting or infringing the constitutional protection on freedom of expression.

The Cooperatives Societies Legislation will make new provision with respect to the registration, supervision, governance, operation and management of cooperatives.

Mr. Speaker further amendments will be made to the Companies Act, Cap 143 and International Business Companies (Amendment and Consolidation) Act, Cap 149.

To ensure that St. Vincent and the Grenadines is up-to-date in regional and international Treaty participation, relevant drafts of Accession and Instruments of Ratification will be prepared.

Central to the democratic process of our nation is Electoral Reform. In 2012, my government will undertake reform of relevant electoral laws to strengthen further our democracy.

Mr. Speaker, a Bill to finalise the procurement and contract administration procedures of government will be tabled in the House. This will enhance institutional capacity for project implementation.

There will also be Amendment to the Financial Administration Act to bolster transparency and good governance in the public service.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, my government remains committed to improving the standard of living for the poor, indigent and marginalised citizens, and to this end, a social policy manual was prepared in March 2011 to address issues related to the Children Against Poverty, teen mothers, male marginalisation and male under-achievement. More development work will be pursued in these respects during 2012.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, 2012 marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the accession of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to the throne. St. Vincent and

the Grenadines and other Commonwealth countries which have Her Majesty as Head of State will be commemorating this Diamond Jubilee with a series of activities. An esteemed member of the Royal Family will be paying us a visit early this year. All relevant announcements will be made shortly.

In closing, I pray that Almighty God will guide you in your deliberations and make you equal to the trust bestowed upon you given the profound responsibility to serve the public interest on behalf of all Vincentians. It therefore, now gives me great pleasure to formally declare the Second Session of the Ninth Parliament open.

May God continue to bless us all!