



Address by Prime Minister Hon. Tillman Thomas
at the ceremony marking Grenada's 38th Anniversary of Independence
National Stadium, 7 February 2012

Salutations

Today is a historic day for us as Grenadian people. Today we celebrate 38 years as an independent nation. Thirty eight years is a significant milestone in our journey toward maturity. Looking back, we have made enormous strides, despite several setbacks. There is a lot to celebrate! Let's reflect on our accomplishments. Let's embrace our successes. Let's be thankful that the Right hand of the Almighty has continuously guided our land.

My fellow Grenadians, the theme for this year's celebrations is "Breaking down all barriers, striving for greater achievements under one flag.

This is a most timely theme, which should motivate us to look for new frontiers, to become pioneers in a period that is characterized by economic difficulty and global uncertainty. We have for many years championed the richness of our land, the uniqueness of our heritage, the resourcefulness of our people and the value of our products.

We now need to seriously mine those attributes and resources. Ladies and Gentlemen, at age 38, we have gained the world's attention and admiration as a world player in athletics, with two finalist and a 400M world champion in Kirani James.

I can still recall our collective pride and spontaneous celebration. We applaud our athletes' efforts and commend their success.

To our young people, you must never ever lose hope. Hopelessness must never be an option! Whatever your talent, whatever your dream; run with perseverance. Run the race of life, anticipating victory! You will have momentary setbacks, but keep your eyes on the finish line.

In the last twenty years, we have had four nationals on the West Indies Cricket team – still a milestone - even though West Indies Cricket is not at the glory days we once enjoyed.

In the cultural arena, we have so much to celebrate. We have given to the world a unique culture which is born out of a rich cultural heritage.

Our language, our creole, our dance, our drums, our carnival and our sweet Grenadian music! Grenada can also be proud of its achievements in the field of education, Many Grenadian sons and daughters are serving in regional and international institutions, making Grenada proud. We salute them.

We must also celebrate the historic visionary initiatives in health education, which now places the St. George's University as a premier world renowned medical University thanks to the foresight and boldness of our father of our Independence, Sir Eric Matthew Gairy.

At 38 years, we have restored the Agricultural sector once more to a place of prominence after years of decline and under performance.

As the son of a farmer, I can attest to the impact of Grenada's Agriculture on other sectors of our economy, including education, health and later tourism.

It was the millions in foreign exchange earned from agriculture and agri-business, that historically gave rise to and supported a thriving commercial sector.

Commodities such as cocoa and nutmegs are now seen globally as unique in flavor and other attributes attracting premium prices in the market place.

By the end of this year we should be exporting to the world two brands of chocolate made right here in Grenada. In addition to the products from the Chocolate factory in Hermitage, St. Patrick, the new cocoa processing plant, a joint venture between the Government of Grenada and the Grenada Cocoa Association in Diamond St. Mark will be operational. We have a lot to celebrate, fellow Grenadians.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me also at this time recognize the efforts of the young entrepreneurs at the spice processing plant at Nianganfor.

This new endeavor, along with already established Nutmed products from Noelville in St. Andrew, provides tremendous potential for the further expansion of our economy. In this vein, I wish to complement the cocoa farmers in St. David who I have been informed, moved their production from 5000 pounds in 2010 to 90,000 pounds in 2011.

I also wish to recognise the contribution of our small producers and cottage industries to employment creation and the diversification of our agri-business sector.

The gains we have made in Tourism, Agriculture and Agri-Business sector particularly in the last three years, are excellent examples of what we as a people can achieve, if we harness our strengths, and put our shoulders to the wheel.

These results, reflect a coalition of government, private sector and all citizens, working together to advance our economic development and overall well-being.

We must now work to integrate and strengthen the linkages between the food production sector and tourism, education and health sectors.

I call upon our educators, our scientists and technologists to develop a closer working relationship with our small producers, the Grenada Chamber of Industry and Commerce, the Junior Achievement Programme and our science students, to identify and develop more viable and marketable products from our raw materials.

We must increase our research and development capabilities to support greater production and improved efficiency as we seek to satisfy niche markets particularly within the Grenadian and the Caribbean Diaspora. These are just few of the significant achievements that we have accomplished in just 38 years. For these and other strides that we have made as a nation, We must be thankful.

Ladies and gentlemen, even as we reflect on and celebrate our accomplishments, we must be mindful that the year 2012 ushers in new challenges. Global economic prospects are described as uncertain.

The World Bank admonishes that "the world is entering a new and dangerous phase". Some refer to dark clouds looming over the horizon.

The reasons for this are primarily the prolonged recession and financial turmoil in Europe, and a slowdown in developing economies.

The economic downturn is likely to be deeper and longer than expected.

But we must NEVER lose hope! We have survived several crises before and by God's guiding right hand we will survive again.

So far, ladies and gentlemen, we have been able to stabilize our economy and stem the downward slide, even though we are operating under considerable pressure and limited

resources.

We have been able to record positive growth in the last year, and we have been laying a solid foundation and preparing the basis for our sustainable future.

That's why we have identified the five pillars of economic transformation.

That's why we have been pursuing targeted activities and projects in those areas.

And to make this paradigm shift in Grenada's development, we need, as a people, to be courageous and selfless with a commitment to teamwork.

It cannot be business as usual.

None of us can do it alone.

Ladies and gentlemen, as part of our strategic priorities, we must push for greater use of alternative energy, solar, wind and thermal, to reduce our dependence on high cost imported fuels. Any success in this area will impact positively on the pocket of each family and will improve our investment attractiveness. One area that can provide employment possibilities is Information and Communications Technology.

ICT ladies and gentlemen, is the vehicle that will connect and attract our highly skilled, computer savvy young people to the world of work. These pillars of economic activity will ensure diversity, resilience and sustainability. It will also allow for the management of our development, our prosperity and our destiny. I am optimistic that we can do this because we have shown over and over that we have the resilience to recover from disasters, triumph over adversity and to leap frog pitfalls. The real issue at this time, is how can we achieve the dreams, hopes and aspirations of each Grenadian man, woman and child. We will be called upon to swim against the tide sometimes, but we must never be satisfied until the goals are achieved. And so, today I am not daunted by the challenge.

I am not afraid of the task and I am not moved by adversity. The urge for a more prosperous Grenada is too strong in my veins. As Prime Minister, I have a VISION for a Grenada where poverty is significantly reduced; where our human resource capacity is strengthened and is appreciated; where production is encouraged and hard work is rewarded. I have a VISION for a country where there is justice and hope for ALL.

I am driven by a resolve that this country can make a leap forward if we collectively aspire, build and advance as ONE people. I dream of a Grenada that is free of acrimony and division. A Grenada, where despite our differences, we remain cordial, courteous, civil and harmonious. A country that is guided by the principles of respect for the people, honesty and fairness in

employment practices and taking hard decisions even when they may not be the most popular ones. That is what is needed to build a strong nation.

That is what is needed to build a strong Grenada. My vision is fashioned by accountability to the people who chose this administration. I have offered a government of principle and high standards. These values were introduced to me in my foundation years and they have fashioned my resolve to do what is right, for my community and for my country.

Today, I recommit to our noble ideals and to chart a united course. We have had a history of strife and conflicts that have retarded our growth over the years.

In fact, George Brizan in his history of Grenada, describes us as an 'Island of Conflict.' Ladies and gentlemen, unless we build the kind of meaningful unity that allows us to stand together while acknowledging that there are differences, we will fail. So today, as I look at our flag and its rich Colours; reflecting the diversity of our people and united in a singleness of purpose, I, I challenge each and every Grenadian, to be optimistic about our future as we work together.

This is not a time for the faint hearted or the weak in Character. I take comfort in the words of Joshua chapter one verse nine, "be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither should you be dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with you wherever you go.

“As the global financial and economic crisis deepens, in the midst of uncertainty, let's be courageous, my fellow Grenadians. Let's strengthen ourselves from within. Our history has taught us that we are a resilient people. In the words of one of our leading artistes, "our nation will rise." And so my message to all our people as we celebrate thirty eight, is to stand together, shoulder to shoulder, and with hands to the wheel, let us build together. We are now at a point in our development where we must shoulder full responsibility for our actions, for our future and for our destiny.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Grenada at 38 has progressed beyond the innocence of childhood. We have graduated from the uncertainties and experimentation of teenage years and the confusion and idealism of young adulthood. Let's advance toward maturity. Whatever your political persuasion, your religious preference or your social standing, let us break the barriers that impede our development as we strive for greater achievements under ONE Flag. This invitation is for all. The call is for whosoever will. The success will be for all.

Thank you. God bless you, and may God bless Grenada.