



NEWS RELEASE

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**National Independence Address
by
Prime Minister Tillman Thomas
on the occasion of Grenada's 37th Anniversary of Independence
"Celebrating 37 years through challenging times with Optimism and
Resilience". Delivered at the Grenada National Stadium at Independence day
Celebrations on February 7th, 2011**

Fellow citizens, ladies and gentlemen, friends of Grenada, as we celebrate thirty seven years of independence, I bring you congratulations and best wishes from your government.

Today we celebrate the rich experience of constitutional democracy which is alive, healthy and treasured in our state of Grenada. We celebrate today the maturing of a society that was born out of many struggles and a burning desire to chart and direct our own future.

We celebrate today our many achievements and accomplishments as a developing country ever conscious of God.

Today, we congregate at a unique period in the world's history. A period characterized by environmental, financial, social and economic challenges. These prevailing conditions have so far tested our capacity, our strength, our creativity and our resilience. No country seems to be immune.

However, in the midst of all this there is good news.

As a people, we have persevered. We have weathered the storm and we have achieved many of our goals. The Grenadian reality is that we have done better than many and for this we must be thankful and proud.

Fellow citizens, during the last year our government has been able to continue our journey of stabilizing the Grenadian economy. We have been able to stem the slide of negative growth from 7.7% to 1.4%.

The following highlights are noteworthy:

- Our agricultural sector continues to perform -- achieving a 8.5% growth last year. This performance was driven primarily by growth in crop production and a sustained increase in the production of fruits, vegetables and fish;
- There has been an increase by 29.3% in earnings from agricultural exports;
- We were able to preserve jobs during the downturn, as a nation; and
- We successfully implemented the VAT, as a major part of our goal to reform and simplify our fiscal structure.

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Ladies and gentlemen, we did all this and many more despite the economic turmoil that enveloped the world. We achieved all this because as a nation we have collectively put our shoulders to the wheel.

Our achievements to date speak to our resolve to focus on stronger economic management and our relentless pursuit of a better life for all Grenadians. Just as we did as a people during the year of our independence 1974, we continue to demonstrate our indomitable spirit and our characteristic resilience.

And so, today we pay special tribute to our farmers, our fisher folk, our teachers, our health care workers, our security services, our tradesmen, our public servants, our businessmen and women, our parents, our senior citizens, our young people and all who contribute daily to the sustenance of our nation.

For we do know that when anyone of you succeeds, Grenada succeeds.

As we commence a new year, there are positive signs of a slow economic recovery. Most of the major economies of the world are showing signs of an economic turnaround. Our own Grenadian economy is projected to do likewise. Positive growth of 2.2% is expected with construction, agriculture and tourism being the main drivers.

Our optimism for a better year is supported by our respectable performance during the past two years despite the economic turbulence. Building on this, we have increased our capital programmes to support growth in the key productive sectors.

Additionally, some strategic projects will commence within the next two months.

More importantly however, our optimism is driven and informed by the strength and character of our Grenadian people who have always risen to the various challenges of the day.

Our optimism is also rooted in our conviction that a primary prerequisite for sustainable economic development is the adherence to our fundamental core values of integrity, honesty and good governance.

That is why ladies and gentlemen, we have set up the office of the Ombudsman.

And that is why we are finalizing all the arrangements for the operation of the Integrity commission. This commission will play a critical role in ensuring high ethical standards and practices among all public officers. It is well known that there is an inseparable link between a country's socio-economic progress and its good ethical practices. Conversely, the prevalence of corruption have retarded and stymied such progress in many countries around the world.

As promised, we have raised the integrity bar.

So far, we have changed the patriotic tenor and mood of our country. Grenadians can now exhale and breathe comfortably. Public servants can now function in an environment free of fear of victimization.

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Our government has not squandered, neither have we given away any of our people's assets or heritage. In fact, we have so far managed prudently and responsibly.

Our country remains blessed with fertile land, beautiful beaches, warm, intelligent and industrious people.

We enjoy peace, tranquility and relatively low crime, a situation not enjoyed by many of our Caribbean neighbours.

Our country is free.

Our democracy is flourishing more than ever before.

Ladies and gentlemen this is what constitutes good governance, a hall mark of this government.

As recently announced at our budget presentation, our focus during 2011 is on job creation, social protection and sustainable economic growth. That is why there are no new taxes this year. There are no cuts in any social programmes; we have expanded the capital budget and increased the allocations for all the productive sectors.

We have also extended the stimulus initiatives we introduced last year and we will launch a Youth Employment Initiative to provide employment opportunities for One Thousand Five Hundred young people.

Ladies and gentlemen, all of these bold actions are necessary to deal with the challenging times. Most importantly these actions place our people at the center of our development.

We cannot sit around and hope. It is not business as usual. The success of these programmes and indeed Grenada, require a concerted effort by all to build our country.

This is not time for political posturing and the pursuance of individual agendas.

It is the time for greater unity.

It is the time for the pursuance of greater self reliance.

It is the time for digging deep within our souls, for being creative, for using all our resources to solve our problems and to find new solutions.

Ladies and gentlemen, our country's future success is integrally linked to the success of the OECS economic union. This union is of utmost importance as we collectively move as a region to broaden and deepen our integration process. This strategic initiative is inevitable and necessary to adequately deal with global challenges and their resultant impacts.

As a region, we have achieved much, but the time has come for us to do more.

As a Grenadian people we must continue to broaden our horizons and begin to embrace new possibilities and opportunities beyond our immediate borders.

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For it is true that if the OECS and CARICOM succeed, Grenada succeeds.

This is absolutely necessary if we are to effectively and meaningfully engage the world in pursuit of our mutual interest.

So, as we celebrate today, we pay homage to our forefathers whose vision, courage and burning aspirations to be masters of our own destiny have bequeathed to us an independent Grenada.

- A Grenada, that must be Grenadian.
- A Grenada, that must be West Indian.
- A Grenada, that we must continue to develop, nurture, sustain and preserve for our future generations.

In keeping with those noble goals, we will continue to recognize our heroes and outstanding citizens. In this regard, we will soon be recognizing some of our sporting icons by affixing their names to sections of this stadium and its surroundings.

Ladies and gentlemen, just like our forefathers weathered many storms and laid the fundamentals for our current sustenance, I am confident that as a nation we will prosper and succeed.

We must work harder towards the fulfillment of our goals. We must pledge our commitment towards ensuring that peace and stability prevails within our nation.

We must harness our many strengths while accepting our differences.

We must rededicate ourselves to making Grenada a better place.

And remember, patriotism is not simply about flying our flag, singing our national anthem and wearing our national colours. It is, more importantly, about respecting our institutions, taking pride in what is uniquely ours and protecting state property. Let us not simply sing “Grenada, land of ours”, but respectfully conduct ourselves as if Grenada is proudly our land.

On this 37th anniversary, my administration wishes all a wonderful independence day.

May God continue to bless and guide us as a nation.

I thank you.