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THE TEXT OF PRIME MINISTER MITCHELL'S ADDRESS TO THE NATION



The following is the text of Grenada Prime Minister Dr Keith Mitchell's address Friday September 10, 2004.

You are all very much aware Hurricane Ivan has come and left Grenada, in a state of devastation. It has claimed the lives of several persons, flattened our agricultural sector, it has destroyed our homes and public buildings and schools, it has brought our domestic power supplies and telecommunication systems and other infrastructure to a halt and made them virtually unavailable to the population.

The destruction is so massive that our economy has been brought to a standstill. As the radio communication is being restored I wish to assure all our citizens, all our visitors, and our residents that your government is definitely in charge and is restoring the pulse beat of the country.

We are down as we all know, but we definitely are not out. In the days since the passage of Ivan the Terrible, we have been working, in fact even during the hurricane Nero has been communicating with other regional and international agencies, identifying and making arrangements for post-hurricane disaster relief efforts.

As a result of the work done by Nero and the government as a whole not only are we better prepared but the post-hurricane activities are being, as I am seeing it, well coordinated.

We already have in place emergency assistance in the form of security manpower, from the regional security service to assist the Royal Grenada Police command and increase security in our country and medical and nursing assistance to relieve the hard working medical personnel in our country are also coming to us from various parts.

The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago the Honorable Patrick Manning, was in Grenada yesterday and spent two hours at my residence and offered assistance from the people and government of Trinidad and Tobago. The Prime Minister committed manpower help with the reconstruction and to get our essential services up and running again.

He has also pledged initially \$10 million TT assistance immediately. He has indicated that he expects us to provide specific requests later for additional support. He indicated that he had the support of the entire population of Trinidad and Tobago in his initiative to help Grenada in every sense of the word. Shipments of relief supplies have begun to arrive and distribution will begin soon to shelters and other needy persons such as the aged and the sick. In Trinidad and Tobago, specifically so, voluntary assistance by Trinidadians has been coming from radio and television and all media houses, the Coast Guard and even individuals have brought supplies by sea using their own initiative. The British naval ship has also been here since Tuesday and rendering voluntary assistance in several forms, particularly in the medical services area. They have offered to provide a brigade to help with the restoring the infrastructural activities, specifically in the area of your telephone and electricity.

The Secretary General of the United Nations has been in touch through his representatives and has been attempting to make contact with me directly but as you are aware that was a difficult prospect. But his personnel has been here to date and has made contact. We have been able to make contact also with several prime ministers in the region who have called, the first one being the Prime Minister of Barbados, the Honorable Owen Arthur. I need also to report that the President of the United States through the Secretary of State Colin Powell has been in contact with me directly just about two hours ago.

There was an emergency meeting at the State Department, they indicated that assistance from the US government with specific instructions from the President of the US George Bush to help the people of Grenada. They indicated also that a special package of financial assistance is being organized with the US Congress through the initiative of the President. We will hear specific

information later.

The Secretary General of Caricom has come to see me this morning, so too the Director General of the OECS. They have discussed mobilizing regional and international assistance.

This morning also I signed an agreement with the Caribbean Development Bank literally on a piece of paper to provide US\$500,000 in immediate assistance to help in the clearing of bushes and roads and every aspect of infrastructure in the country. This is in the form of emergency aid.

In our time of distress the regional and international community has been completely mobilized to help Grenada. The government is working to bring relief to all our citizens. Some of course are in greater need than others. I think that it is important for me to call on all citizens to recognize a sense of patriotism at this particular time. The most needy will get the most. There can be no partisan interest in this respect. National disaster is national disaster.

I would also like to call on all our citizens to cooperate with the police force. It is important for us to recognize that roaming the streets at this time cannot be the best thing for anyone. Emergency personnel alone should really occupy the streets of the land at this time. It's not a time for sightseeing and for looking around, it is a time for providing support. Those who are not required to be on the road should not interfere with the emergency aid given to the country at this time.

Many initiatives are being taken, fellow Grenadians, at this time to bring our country back on the proper footing. We propose to raise with the financial community, a system for householders to restore their homes to what they used to be before Ivan touched us. Those who have lost homes will in fact get some form of assistance based on the initiative that the cabinet is looking at this particular time.

It is also important that the banks and financial institutions have already indicated that they are prepared to work for the government in some form of support, whether it is in the form, after we have sat down, of a moratorium on payments for a short period of time or in the form of reduction of interest rates for the reconstruction efforts but it certainly would require some sort of sacrifice on the part of every single person.

No one should attempt to profit from the destruction and sufferings of others at this particular time.

I think it is also important for me to call on all citizens-we have seen, while others are making tremendous sacrifices, we seen members of the police force who have been working days, and who do not even know where their families are at this time, making sacrifices in attempting to bring support and order to the population and to the less fortunate-while they are doing that, there are those among us, unfortunately so, that seek to gain material benefit from the suffering of the population at this particular time.

I call upon every single citizen to have a conscience. It is not the time to think of ourselves as individuals. It is not a time to think of benefiting materially. What can we do with material things when life is in danger, when your own people are suffering. We must have a conscience. My brothers and sisters, we have had a major setback, but we must also thank God for life and limb.

We have to thank God because the disaster we went through could have been worse than it is at this particular time. We have to realize when we look at the destruction to our homes and property that without the support of the Almighty it could have been much worse, to the extent of loss of life.

Every single day we are discovering more bodies, as we survey the houses that have collapsed and as relatives that kept vigil and watched. We are really sorry for the loss of life, our hearts and sympathy for the family and friends of those who have died. Their sacrifice obviously must always be remembered because maybe their loss may be, you never know, may be the nation's gain. God has been good to Grenada, fellow citizens. We must also recognize that we must not misinterpret what has happened. We as a people have been tried and tested in the past, we have to keep the faith as we did before, so that we may not be found wanting as a nation.

As a nation must we step up to the plate, we must take the trials and we must deal with them with love, patience and fortitude and

as we move forward to rebuild this beautiful country to the stars, I wish us to do so with one love, one unity, one peace. This cannot be the time for partisan interest. I take this opportunity to invite the Leader of the Opposition, the Honorable Mr. Tillman Thomas and members of the opposition to meet with us, to join the government, that we can create a united front to face the massive reconstruction effort and redevelopment effort that lie ahead.

Nothing but absolute unity would in fact send the right message to our international friends and regional friends who are attempting to help us at this time, and I believe that as a united force, we as a people can turn this disaster into a blessed opportunity for our children and our grandchildren. Let us treat this as an opportunity for a new beginning to rethink and to reconstruct and to restore Grenada to a path of modern development.

Fellow citizens, for me personally, it has been a trying experience as I myself had to face the possibility of my own personal destruction on the night of the day of Ivan. What was clear to me is, and I would remember always, we are here on this earth for a while.

Whenever opportunities arise to help others, in this short period of time we should do so. Take all the opportunities to do so, and to help as much as we can, and this is a time, in my opinion, as the old saying goes, "no bad breeze blow".

In every disaster, we can always see opportunities. It is for us now to use the message of this major destruction to do for our country what we all expect for citizens, especially for children, your grandchildren. I call on everyone therefore to do what you can to help what is destroyed. Grenada needs you more now more than ever. I want to thank you. And to each and every one of you, let us continue to communicate the right message.

Let us pray to the Almighty for his blessings and let us sacrifice for each other.



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