

Grenada's Prime Minister address to the Nation - Hurricane Ivan impact

By Grenada GIS

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SPEECH TO NATION BY DR. THE HON. KEITH MITCHELL Monday 20th September, 2004

Fellow Grenadians, one week ago we all woke up to a scene of unimaginable desolation and fear. Fear because none of us knew for sure what had happened, who had been killed, who had lost what, so we all feared the worst.

From Petite Martinique to Point Salines, when the winds subsided, I believe that as most of you dared to crawl from your places of hiding from the wrath of the storm, Ivan, you couldn't believe your eyes as you looked around.

I am sure our consciousness of God's presence has become even more real to many of us and we are still thanking Him for sparing most of our lives through it all.

My family and I are thankful that we escaped the destruction brought when the Prime Minister's official residence was destroyed.

I can say the same thing about our distinguished Governor General who was lucky to survive the wrath of IVAN at the official residence of the Government House.

More than one week after, I am glad to see the smiles beginning although small so to return to the faces of many in our country. Even as the sun has come out in all of its glory after the storm, the fear and desperation is abating and many can now even joke about some of their experiences.

I guess in the years to come the common question might be "Where were you when Hurricane Ivan struck?"

But we must extend our sympathies to those who have lost loved ones. One youngster from Beaulieu lost his mother and baby sister when a wall fell onto their house.

None of us could enter into the trauma it must have been for this youngster to have witnessed firsthand the wrath of nature and then his mother being dragged lifeless from the rubble.

Many others like him in one way or another both old and young have been severely affected and traumatized by this extremely violent force of nature. For those of you who have suffered the loss of a loved one, let us be even more sensitive of their needs as they try to rebuild not just physically, but even more importantly, emotionally.

Sadly, I must report that some unfortunate elements of our society, exploited the moments of shock and despair to behave in a manner that was downright disgusting and regrettable. Here I am referring to those who looted and destroyed even that which was spared the wrath of Ivan the Terrible. Thankfully, such incidents of looting were quickly brought under control. Whereas I have to acknowledge that some members of our society behaved in a most disgusting manner, even more sadly, that some members of the security services instead of maintaining law and order and securing the society, were themselves guilty of such disorderly conduct, and breaking the same law they were supposed to uphold.

Now is not the time to wash our dirty linen in public, but I want you to know that I am very aware of some of what went on and in the right time we will deal with it accordingly.

In contrast, I want to acknowledge those of you who rose to the occasion above and beyond the call of duty.

I know of those of you who placed your own personal and family situation second, to the needs of others even more



Prime Minister Dr Keith Mitchell

distressed. I know of those of you from the Health Services, from the Security Forces, from the Emergency Relief Organisation and other areas of service and even political organizations.

I have been even touched by one young police officer who worked through the night of the storm and four days later he was still on the job, having never left his post not knowing what has happened to his own family. It is commitment like this that would help us to rebuild this great little nation of ours.

It must have been a sacrifice for him and others like himself, to have put their own personal needs the needs of their family second to the needs of those in most urgent need.

Yes, there will be those who in the midst of the chaos and confusion would exploit the situation for their own selfish purposes, but the majority sought to improve the condition of others. To all of you I say special thanks on behalf of all Grenadians, Carriacounians and Petit Martiniqueans.

The management of our public utilities must be commended for their work in restoring a limited service where possible. I know that there are many who are still without service and I empathize with you in a very serious way.

In time like these, we realize how important clean running water really is. I know the frustration of many of you because you still don't have some of the basic services, but we are doing all that we can under the circumstances and with the assistance of some of our Caribbean neighbours and international friends, to get water and other basic services flowing to all of Grenadians that existed before the Hurricane Ivan struck.

I want to be very candid with you and say that full restoration could take a while in some cases, so please be patient with us and believe me; we do understand the urgency of the situation.

GRENLEC's quick and decisive action restored power to the hospital allowing the staff there to be able to reduce the pain and suffering of those being brought there for treatment of one kind or another.

Although affected in one way or another, the telecommunications providers were able to keep portions of their network working in some cases and have restored it to some level of normalcy, enabling you to contact loved ones at home and even more importantly overseas.

Cable and Wireless must be commended for keeping portions of both their landline and mobile service operational even during the ferocity of the storm.

I must also commend the new entrant in the mobile market, Digicel, because it has been brought to my attention that they have committed to giving some one million EC dollars worth of free credit to their customers and another one million dollars to the Red Cross.

I must also commend ATT Wireless for providing some community service like the others as quickly as they did.

Fellow Grenadians, even as we sought to gather our wits about us in the early hours of this tragedy, our neighbours and other friendly governments were mobilizing supplies at great speed to provide relief to us.

This was true even for some countries such as Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and St. Vincent and the Grenadines who were themselves affected and suffered loss as a result of the passage of Ivan.

Prime Minister Manning and the people of Trinidad and Tobago were first out of the block offering tangible assistance.

Our allies in the United States, United Kingdom and Cuba who have stood with us in the past, once again came alongside ready to assist, and continues to do so in more ways than one, even as I speak to you.

Admittedly when the first loads of relief supplies began to arrive, we did not yet seek out the distribution channels.

Although there was a plan, the systems put in place and even other back up systems, all failed regrettably in the face of the magnitude of the situation, which we never expected.

This did create some concerns both for us on the ground and also the donors. I want to assure all of you that this matter is being corrected and we now have a distribution network in place and we are hoping to continue increasing it's efficiency as the days go by.

Let me make it clear that whatever shortcomings there was in the distribution system is something that has caused me great concern and pain. The system we envisaged and planned was intended to be politically transparent and fully accountable.

Sadly it didn't work and we had to go back to the drawing board. People interfered and in some cases the system buckled under the sheer pressure. I want to make it abundantly clear that if ever leadership required was supposed to be non-partisan it must be now. It is my view that any serious politician in this time should recognize under the circumstances that we face the best politics now is no politics at all. Of that I am fully aware and to that I am absolutely committed.

There is one huge lesson we can all learn from this, and it is that when it matters most we can put aside our differences, no matter what they might be and operate first and foremost in the interest of Grenada, Carriacou and Petit Martinique. Let us never forget this lesson and continue to build this great country of ours.

I think it is important Sister and Brothers, to mention many of our countries over and over again that come to our rescue, even before we ask, the Government and People of Trinidad and Tobago as I said before, as I said before, the Government and People of St. Lucia, the Government and People of France, the Government and People of United States, the Government and People of several countries internationally all of them too numerous to mention all of them came to our aid.

The Ambassadors of those country continue to come in to offer significant commitment of aid to our country to all of them I will continue to say special thanks to all of you. The question now however is how do we return to normalcy? I can assure that it will not be easy but we must commit ourselves to doing it.

Grenada belongs to all of us and we must do all that we can to rebuild it. Like the workers in the Old Testament Book of Nehemiah who rebuilt the walls of the destroyed city that had so much rubbish that even Nehemiah despaired at the task, but committed himself to seeking his God and motivating his people.

He used a simple formula that I would like us to copy. Let every man take responsibility for the area close to his home. In Nehemiah's day they rebuilt the walls in an amazing 52 days.

Rebuilding Grenada will be a monumental task, but we can do it together and we certainly will.

I myself and members of my Cabinet will be out putting our hands to the task ahead as we have started doing I am asking you to join us in rebuilding this beautiful country of ours.

Our neighbours are watching us, they have sacrificed much to get assistance to us, and we must now demonstrate our own commitment to our development.

As life slowly returns to some normalcy I am calling on all Grenadians to take to head, heart and hands the words of our National Anthem.

I know as you look around and look at your own situation, there is reason to despair and lose hope. Please don't give in to that. See this as an opportunity to start over, to rebuild to breathe again. So when the urge to despair or lose hope comes on you, remember our pledge to this beautiful land ours

Hail Grenada land of ours,
We pledge ourselves to thee,

Heads, hearts and hands in Unity
To reach our destiny.

Ever conscious of God,
Being proud of our Heritage

May we with faith and courage
Aspire, build and advance

As one people, one family
May God truly bless every single one of you and good afternoon.

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