



**National Address by  
Dr. the Right Honourable Keith Mitchell  
Prime Minister, Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique  
May 10, 2020**

Fellow Grenadians, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be the greatest challenge facing Grenada and many other countries around the world. However, with this unprecedented challenge comes opportunities for innovation and strategic thinking to restart our economies. It calls for all of us to have more patience, love and tolerance in dealing with each other.

In the midst of the pandemic, Government must carefully balance competing priorities - ensuring that our health care system and workers are adequately prepared to deal with COVID-19, while at the same time, easing into a micro-economic framework that allows more and more businesses to operate in keeping with the recommended protocols.

As such, effective Monday, May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020, every day will be a designated business day, that is, for the businesses already granted permission to operate and those resuming this week. Approved businesses will operate their respective pre-COVID schedules within the allotted time, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The daily curfew remains in place, from 7:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m.

Government anticipates an uptick in economic activity with the resumption of work in the construction industry this week. Health and safety guidelines have been created and the contractor for each project must seek and be granted permission from the construction sub-committee before actual work resumes.

Other new areas slated for reopening this week include, real estate services, laundromats, landscapers and gardeners, flower shops, consumer credit stores and companies offering payday loans.

With many workers dependent on public transportation, Government is working with stakeholders to develop appropriate social distancing and hygienic measures that will guide the resumption of this service. An official announcement will be made in the coming days.

Limited ferry services have also been approved for reopening this week, between mainland Grenada and the two sister islands. We will continue to work closely with the service providers to ensure that the operational guidelines are adhered to.

As many await the re-opening of our external borders, I hasten to say that while this is imminent, we are not there yet. Borders were closed to prevent the spread of the virus and to save lives, and for now, we must maintain that status quo. At the most recent meetings of CARICOM and OECS leaders, we collectively agreed to start gradually relaxing the restrictions for travel, as the pandemic in the region has been largely contained. Governments, airlines and hotels are now finalising the details of this phased re-opening. Assuming that the requisite protocols are in place, we expect to open our borders in the first week of June. I assure you, fellow Grenadians, we will not move unless we are satisfied that adequate health and safety guidelines are in place.

This same rationale also influenced the decision to cancel Spicemas 2020 because we simply cannot compromise the health, safety and well-being of our people.

This weekend, we witnessed the return of some of our nationals who were employed by cruise ships. Sisters and brothers, on one hand, we cannot deny the right of our citizens to return home but on the other hand, our returning nationals must understand, that in the midst of a health crisis, they can potentially spread the virus. Rest assured that the necessary health measures were followed. The arriving individuals were tested and transported directly to mandatory quarantine facilities.

To provide further clarity on the mandatory quarantine for returning crew members, Government is now single-handedly bearing the cost of almost \$200,000 to provide these facilities because the cruise lines have not accepted responsibility, despite earlier agreement to do so.

To those who remain stranded aboard ships and in other countries, we ask you to understand that in dealing with this health crisis, the actions of Government must be guided by the capacity of our healthcare system to cope with any potential outbreak of the disease.

We are open to receive stranded Grenadians, as long as they have the means to find their way home, and bearing in mind, our limited capacity to provide state quarantine facilities. All persons allowed to come in, will be placed in mandatory quarantine at a designated facility for at least two weeks.

I am pleased to announce that to date, we have no new confirmed cases of COVID-19. The results for all 84 PCR tests conducted on May 8<sup>th</sup> are negative for the virus. This includes the 64 people associated with the cluster detected at one place of business. Additionally, the final hospitalised case has been discharged and the remaining six active cases are reported to be doing well.

Sisters and brothers, our successful management of this health crisis must go hand in hand with rebuilding the local economy. We have assembled a task force of dedicated public and private sector officials, to spearhead this effort.

Seven Cabinet-approved, sub-committees, have also been assigned responsibility for each of the productive sectors of the economy, namely, Tourism and Citizenship by Investment (CBI); Construction (Private and Public); Education Services – St. George’s University; Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises; Agriculture and Fisheries; Wholesale & Retail Trade & Manufacturing; E-Commerce/Digitisation. They are reviewing the current situation in each sector and identifying priorities for phased implementation.

We are also buoyed by the fact that in the midst of this crisis, investor confidence remains high. The recent acquisition of Port Louis and Mount Cinnamon, with plans to add up to 500 new hotel rooms, in an investment worth more than US\$350 million, speaks volumes for the recovery potential of our economy. It is important to note that no concessions will be given until the developer is ready to begin construction of the four hotels.

As we make future projections, critical actions are required now to bring relief to our citizens. Cabinet has therefore approved, in principle, price support payments for nutmeg farmers. The terms and conditions are being finalised with the Grenada Cooperative Nutmeg Association. Government is also awaiting an update from the Grenada Cocoa Association as to what assistance, if any, is required for those farmers.

Government has also stepped in to lend support to poultry farmers, moving quickly to approve a trade license and waive the duties on two emergency shipments of feed, which became necessary after a shortage created by the mandatory closure of the main local supplier.

These and other initiatives, are in addition to the economic stimulus package I announced very early in our COVID-19 response effort, and they come at a time when Government itself is dealing with the devastating impact of the pandemic. From projections for an eighth consecutive year of growth, Government is now facing the stark reality of negative growth, triggered largely by the significant impact on tourism, construction and education. This has resulted in a drastic decline in Government revenue. In April for example, the combined revenue collection by Customs and Internal Revenue Division dropped by about \$30 million compared to that of 2019; a decline likely to be replicated across our main revenue generating departments over the next few months.

Government is therefore utilising its reserves and seek international help to finance any deficits and bring relief to its citizens, while continuing the fight against the deadly virus. Already, we have attracted funding from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the European Union, the Government of India, the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank and the Caribbean Development Bank among others. We continue to look at other sources for grant and soft loan financing, as well as explore options for debt relief.

Notwithstanding, the team at the Ministry of Finance and the newly established COVID-19 Economic Support Secretariat, along with the relevant stakeholders have been working diligently to fine-tune and implement the relief measures. We are still in

the very early stages of the roll-out, but to date, close to 2,000 Grenadians have benefitted from the payroll and income support initiatives.

The application and verification process is ongoing and proving to be very time-consuming. However, staff members at the secretariat are working day and night and on weekends, to ensure that applications are duly processed, and payments promptly made. Government is also considering expanding the categories of workers who are eligible for income support to bring greater relief to a wider cross-section of the population.

Later this month, the National Insurance Scheme is expected to begin paying unemployment benefits to eligible persons. It is estimated that more than 5,000 people will receive the benefits, disbursed over six months. The suspension of the 2% increase in NIS payment is already in effect and will cover the period, April to June 2020.

The monthly advanced installment on Corporate Income Tax and installment payments on the Annual Stamp Tax have been suspended to help businesses ease any cash flow problems during this period. We note, however, that some have opted to proceed with regular payments and we commend them.

As promised, Government has made additional funding available for disbursement through the existing small business lending facility at the Grenada Development Bank. The maximum threshold available under this fund has been increased to \$40,000. Additionally, a reduced interest rate of 3% is being offered to people involved in agriculture, fisheries and agro-processing.

Electricity consumers will feel less of a pinch from this month as they start to benefit from the promised 30% reduction in bills. Government is investing more than \$7 million and we are grateful for the cooperation of Grenlec and WRB Enterprises for contributing \$3 million. These are the types of partnerships needed as we chart the way forward.

Here too, I must publicly express Government's gratitude to St. George's University, which has been facilitating the PCR testing. SGU has also supplied the General Hospital with a portable x-ray unit, ventilators, cardiac monitors, sonogram units and other medical equipment that will not only bolster our readiness in the fight against COVID-19, but better position the healthcare system to offer improved care to our people. As for its own business operations, which represent over 20% of Grenada's GDP, SGU is also working closely with Government on the appropriate timeframe and methodology for getting students back to the campus. Protocols are being developed for their re-entry.

We are also grateful to other donors, including the Government and People of Cuba, the People's Republic of China, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, our diplomatic representatives abroad, the Alibaba Group, Canadian Bank Note, the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), the National Lotteries Authority, Digicel, Flow, and all others who have assisted in bolstering our capacity to fight this disease.

There are many other partners deserving of commendation: for example, the individuals and organisations that have been distributing food and other supplies for those in need. I personally thank and commend you for being your brother's keeper.

Despite the generosity of so many, there appears to be a crisis developing within the COVID-19 crisis. Some people are feeling overwhelmed and hopeless as we endure the psychological and emotional toll of the pandemic. I assure you that there is hope. The Ministry of Social Development is leading the charge in providing counselling and helping people to develop stronger coping mechanisms. Church offices are already open to provide counseling services and private individuals are also offering to provide psychological help to those in need.

I thank those who are on the frontline of the fight against COVID-19. We often see the doctors and nurses but today, I also recognise all other staff in the healthcare system who have contributed in one way or another to this effort. I call on those who are not pulling their weight, to do their fair share.

I must thank too, the COVID committee for their dedicated service in helping us to navigate through this crisis. Thanks to our prison officers, private security guards, bus operators providing transportation for essential workers, garbage collectors, public servants and all others who make daily sacrifices to help us through this period. I thank you, the nation thanks you, and we appreciate you.

The Commissioner of Police and most of his team, have done an excellent job maintaining law and order and I commend them, as well. In recent days, we have heard complaints in the public domain, alleging abuse by police officers. To date, no formal complaints have been filed but I am assured by the Commissioner that the instances brought to our attention, will be examined. There is no excuse for inappropriate action by police officers, but as citizens, we all have a responsibility to be guided by the law and to respect the enforcers of the law.

I take this opportunity, as well, to strongly condemn and discourage the senseless acts of violence, domestic and child abuse and other crimes that we perpetrate against each other. Our new stressful environment is simply not an excuse for wrongdoing. Further, to those who are using the restrictions imposed by the State of Emergency to charge excessive prices for goods and services, it is wrong and morally reprehensible. I have to ask, where is our conscience? Our God will not let this behaviour go unpunished. These actions will not be condoned and the RGPF is empowered to take action.

Sisters and brothers, from all indications, we are successfully waging the war on COVID-19, but questions abound, about the overall impact and our ability to recover. I say to you, with utmost confidence that Grenada will get through this. Government continues to embrace its role as leader and we pray that through God's guidance, we will make the right decisions.

We, therefore, welcome the confirmation of the National Day of Prayer being planned by the Conference of Churches and the Alliance of Evangelical Churches for May 17<sup>th</sup>. It is an opportunity for us to come together on bended knees and with humbled hearts, to seek divine intervention as we navigate through this crisis. Further, we eagerly

anticipate the resumption of church services and we await the conclusion of discussions with religious organisations on developing the requisite guidelines. The status of our children continues to be a priority consideration. Regional protocols have been developed for education and are now being examined by local authorities to determine what is feasible for Grenada and the timeline for returning to the classroom.

Fellow Grenadians, we will emerge from this pandemic stronger and more resilient. We have faced serious challenges before and I have no doubt that we will also prevail in the face of this deadly crisis. I acknowledge the immense sacrifices being made by some but there are others who simply sit back and criticise. I urge you, let us all strive to do better in this crucial period. Grenada's survival and recovery must be a collective effort. In unity, there is strength. At this time too, our thoughts and prayers are with those who have lost loved ones in the diaspora, to the dreaded disease.

Sisters and brothers, in closing, I salute the mothers across the nation, particularly my own, who I'm not able to interact with as usual. I extend greetings also, to the men who play the dual role of mother and father. It has not been the typical Mothers' Day, with the many church services, luncheons and other activities through which we traditionally celebrate you, but I hope that in some small way today, you have felt the love and appreciation of those around you. Happy Mothers' Day to all of you.

I thank you.