

THRONE SPEECH

DELIVERED

by

HIS EXCELLENCY

THE GOVERNOR GENERAL OF ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

SIR FREDERICK BALLANTYNE, G.C.M.G.

ON

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 04, 2019

AT

THE FOURTHSESSION

OF

THE TENTH PARLIAMENT

*The House of Assembly
Kingstown
St. Vincent and the Grenadines*

February 04, 2019

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Delivered by

His Excellency Sir Frederick Ballantyne, GCMG, MD

at the Fourth Session of the Tenth Parliament

Monday, February 4th, 2019

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I consider it an honour and a privilege to address this House at the commencement of the Fourth Session of the Tenth Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, the programmatic focus of my Government for the 2019 fiscal period is defined by the following imperatives:

- a well-articulated national developmental framework which rationalizes and links our collective efforts;
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- the necessity of celebrating success and consolidating hard-won gains so as to foster even greater national pride, identity and solidarity among our citizens, and
- the recognition that there remains much work to be done to ensure that the resources of this Nation are equitably distributed and available to all, particularly the most vulnerable.

In order to fulfill its mandate, my Government has set out a development agenda that is people-centred, with emphasis on:

- good governance,
 - the maintenance of law and order, and citizen security,
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- the education and training of nationals to equip them to function optimally in this modern environment,
- the provision of quality healthcare and other social services, and
- infrastructural development, including road improvement and a roster of other major projects.

Mr. Speaker, the past year was marked by a number of notable achievements and by a range of challenges. We must give thanks to Almighty God for sparing us the ravages of any major weather event or other type of natural disaster. We remember and pray for our neighbours in the region and further afield who have been affected by adverse, even catastrophic events, and who continue the struggle to recover, rebuild and restore normalcy to their lives.

Mr. Speaker, among the many recent achievements that are worthy of celebration are the excellent results recorded by our students in the academic arena. These were justly recognised and rewarded by the granting of a record number of National Scholarships, National Exhibitions, Special Scholarships and Bursaries, to forty-eight (48) graduates of various programmes offered by the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Community College. In addition, over 87% of the students exiting the primary system in 2018 met the prescribed standards for the Caribbean Primary Exit Assessment (CPEA).

Mr. Speaker, our young citizens continue to excel in many fields of endeavour. In so doing, they continually remind us that, contrary to the way in which they have been portrayed by some, theirs is not a lost and aimless generation, either mired in apathy or surfing mindlessly and gleefully on waves of dysfunctionality or worse. The vast majority of our young people are patriotic, well-meaning, decent, focused, engaged, and eager and willing to assume the responsibility of nation-building.

Mr. Speaker, the challenge of any small, developing Nation is creating and exploiting opportunities for the growth and advancement of its people, particularly the youth. This must, by necessity, involve the championing of effective interventions aimed at steering those at risk away from the margins of the society and integrating them into the fabric of national development, citizen engagement and worthy achievement. Much work continues to be done in this regard, including initiatives in support of the following:

- youth empowerment through employment and training, including the ongoing recruitment process for nurses to be employed in the United Kingdom;
 - initiatives such as the School Feeding and the Zero Hunger Programmes which ensure that the material needs of disadvantaged students are met;
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- internship programmes and other work-readiness training, including the Support for Education and Training (SET), the Youth Empowerment Services (YES) and the Youth-in-Agriculture programmes;
 - Support programmes for teen mothers, including parenting workshops;
 - Behaviour Modification and anti-violence programmes, including the Good Citizens Campaign led by the National Reconciliation and Ecclesiastical Affairs Unit of the Ministry of Education;
 - The Pan-Against-Crime programme which is soon to be complemented by a Sport-Against-Crime initiative with matching objectives, and
 - Legislation related to Child Protection and Child Justice which forms part of the legislative agenda for 2019.
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Mr. Speaker, my Government has adopted a foreign policy that is principled, progressive and pragmatic in its orientation, and which is pursued in a strategic and vigorous manner. This is fuelled by commitment to such imperatives as:

- safeguarding and promoting our sovereignty and national interests;
- upholding the Rule of Law internationally, and fulfilling our treaty obligations;
- strengthening bilateral and multilateral diplomacy through effective partnerships, and
- promoting regional integration.

To this end, St. Vincent and the Grenadines will persist in its efforts to build and consolidate relationships with traditional allies and new friends.

Mr. Speaker, our foreign relations have also evolved out of our determination to claim our place on the global stage and to make sure our voice is heard on the major issues of the day.

This is evident in our bid for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council for the period 2020-2021, for which elections will be held in June of this year. This country is also at the helm of several influential regional and international organisations. These include serving as President of the Bureau of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations, for the period 2018 to 2019. We are in the forefront, too, of providing leadership in regional organisations on an ongoing basis. These and other fora provide our small State with the opportunity to influence decision-making at the highest levels regionally and globally.

Mr. Speaker, it cannot be disputed that it is on the subject of the current impasse involving Venezuela that this country has distinguished itself recently as providing principled leadership at a time when much more powerful states have lost sight of the core tenets and values enshrined in such august agreements as the Charter of the United Nations.

My Government has adopted, enunciated and held firmly to its strong, principled and uncompromising stance on the issue of Venezuela's sovereignty, independence, its right to self-determination, and the protection of its democratic processes, the rights of its people and the rule of law. Non-intervention and non-interference in a country's internal affairs are bedrock tenets of international law. This country's championing of these fundamental principles has been steady and unflinching in the face of the diametrically-opposing views and positions of much larger and more powerful countries, many of whom are our friends and allies.

Mr. Speaker, St. Vincent and the Grenadines continues to demonstrate that size is not an impediment and it is certainly not an excuse to buckle under pressure and to succumb to the vagaries of political expediency, detached from the anchor of international law and norms of international relations between states.

Mr. Speaker, my Government has every intention of pursuing a robust and comprehensive legislative agenda during 2019. The updating and amending of existing legislation will be accompanied by the drafting of new laws. To this end, the following have been included on the 2019 legislative agenda:

- The Child Justice Bill
 - The Income Tax Amendment Bill
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- The Tax Administration Procedures Bill
- The Customs Duties (European Union CARIFORUM Economic Partnership Agreement Tariff Amendment) Bill
- The Finance Administration Amendment Bill
- The Finance Administration (Monitoring and Oversight Body) Regulations

Mr. Speaker, the recent amendments to the Police Act, and the timely revision of the recruitment policies and procedures utilised by the Royal St. Vincent and the Grenadines Police Force are indicative of the seriousness with which my Government regards and treats the subject of public order and safety. In addition, the recent commissioning of a 42-metre offshore patrol vessel, the *Captain Hugh Mulzac*, will enhance the capacity of the Coast Guard services to patrol our waters and secure our borders.

Mr. Speaker, the legislative review and revision processes will continue to ensure that our laws remain relevant and applicable to our current context and circumstances. This is integral to the maintenance of good governance, peace, and law and order in any democracy. Moreover, the legislative agenda is geared towards supporting the national development thrust, while simultaneously satisfying our regional and international commitments.

Mr. Speaker, my Government's objective to establish a modern Medicinal Cannabis Industry in this country has been greatly advanced by the passage in this Honourable House of two major pieces of legislation. Currently, my government is putting in place all the consequential regulatory and administrative systems for the overall management of the medical cannabis industry.

Mr. Speaker, my Government is committed to tapping into the enormous potential of this emerging industry to secure economic and social benefits for the citizens of this country through job creation and employment, local and foreign direct investment, increase in foreign exchange earnings, and strengthening of the agricultural and pharmaceutical industries.

The prospects are obvious, as is the need for all this to be managed, directed and regulated in a mature, rigorous and systematic manner. My Government has demonstrated that it has the capacity to accomplish this.

Mr. Speaker, the Plant Protection Bill also forms part of the legislative reform process. It is intended to safeguard our local and indigenous plant species, and to garner international recognition and protection for them through the World International Property Organisation. This is of immediate and critical importance in light of the immense interest shown in the Medicinal Cannabis Industry in this country, particularly in the

unique cannabis strains that are already available and those to be developed in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Legal Affairs has also included on its legislative agenda for 2019 the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union (ECCU) Investment Funds Bill which will replace the Mutual Funds legislation currently in force. This is in compliance with a July 2016 decision of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB) Monetary Council, aimed at reinforcing the legal authority of the Eastern Caribbean Securities Regulatory Commission.

The Securities Bill will also be presented to the Parliament and will serve to promote the growth and development of the Eastern Caribbean Securities Market, thereby strengthening our regional integration efforts. This legislation will also enable the Regional Securities Commission to become a member of the International Organisation of Securities Commissions.

Mr. Speaker, the Electricity Supply Act of 1973 will also receive much-needed attention over the course of the next few months to incorporate the new and emerging technologies in the energy sector. Critical aspects of the amendments concern the generation of electricity from renewable sources, such as geothermal and solar energy, and the establishment of a more effective regulatory system.

The proposed amendments to the Electricity Supply Act are quite timely in view of the work currently being undertaken under several renewable energy initiatives. These include major Solar Voltaic Projects at Union Island, Mayreau, the Argyle International Airport and the Division of Technical and Vocational Studies of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Community College. Home-owners, too, are already taking advantage of my government's sensible and progressive policy regarding solar energy.

The geothermal project is proceeding apace and offers real prospects for the harnessing of previously-untapped indigenous resources for energy generation. Actual drilling is expected to commence in the second quarter of this year.

Mr. Speaker, my Government has consistently demonstrated its commitment to improving the lives of all citizens. The goals, objectives and targets set for 2019 represent a further expression and consolidation of this overarching mandate. They are evident in the programmes and initiatives to be undertaken or advanced and, also, in the infrastructural works to be carried out.

Mr. Speaker, my Government has made significant strides in a multiplicity of sectors, and remains keenly aware of its responsibility to ensure that all citizens are well-positioned to benefit from these gains and, in turn, contribute to their consolidation. Central to these capital projects

is the strengthening of our country's resilience to combat the ravages of climate change.

Mr. Speaker, the Hospitality and Maritime Training Institute, scheduled to become fully operational at the commencement of the upcoming school year, will further expand the available opportunities for the training and development of our young people. This institute is attached to the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Community College, and seeks to improve capacity within the tourism and hospitality sector, as well as the maritime sector.

The most ambitious capital project ever carried out in this country, the Argyle International Airport, provides indisputable evidence that we have the capability and will to accomplish great things even in the face of overwhelming odds. The commissioning of the Argyle International Airport in February 2017 has spurred growth in a number of sectors, including tourism, agriculture and fisheries, and trade.

As a result of direct international air access, this country has recorded increases in visitor arrivals, with concomitant increases in revenue from tourism. Mr. Speaker, my Government intends to capitalise on these gains by developing effective strategies to foster growth in the sector. This will be achieved, in part, by the implementation of projects and programmes meant to build capacity among our human resources.

Mr. Speaker, close attention will also be paid to further improvement of the tourism product. This is supported through the implementation of the Tourism Competitiveness Project. This project is financed by the International Development Association (IDA) of the World Bank and has among its objectives the improvement of tourism sites, the expansion of the regional tourism market, and the articulation of a Tourism Sector Development and Strategic Plan.

Mr. Speaker, work is also being done in the area of hotel construction and the expansion of existing facilities. Both the private and public sectors are so engaged. Plans are well underway by my government for the construction of hotels at Diamond and in the Mt. Wynne area. The private sector development at Peter's Hope and the acquisition of Buccament Resorts by new investor will add to the national effort to enhance the stock of hotel rooms in this country.

Mr. Speaker, another major infrastructural undertaking of my Government will be the Port Development Project, at an estimated cost of US\$145 million. Planning for this is at an advanced stage. Funding is to be provided by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and the Department for International Development (DFID). This project has enormous transformative potential for the capital city and the country as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, my Government has set out to transform and modernise the social and economic landscape of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The new city planned for Arnos Vale, radiating outwards from the site of the decommissioned E.T. Joshua Airport, is another example of this focus. The anchor project for the new city will be the Acute Referral Hospital, which is in the design phase. The proposed 130-bed facility will add significantly to the capacity of the health sector, particularly with respect to the provision of a wider range of specialist services and the decentralisation of health services in general.

The process of decentralisation will be further advanced with the operationalising of the Buccament and Levi Latham Polyclinics over the course of the next few months. Additionally, the residents of the Lewis Punnett Home will be temporarily relocated to facilitate, in the medium-term, the construction of new facilities at the existing site.

Mr. Speaker, the ongoing modernization of the healthcare delivery systems in this country will be supported by the introduction of a Patients' Charter which outlines the roles, expectations and responsibilities of all stakeholders. This Charter will be launched in the first quarter of 2019. Its full and effective implementation can only serve to improve the health services.

Mr. Speaker, the year 2019 is of special significance to this Nation. On October 27th, we will celebrate our fortieth (40th) anniversary of Independence. This is a milestone worthy of celebration by all Vincentians, whether based in St. Vincent and the Grenadines or part of our vast and dispersed Diaspora. This anniversary marks our evolving, yet confident, identity and consciousness as a people, and the maturation of our democracy and its attendant institutions. It is an opportune time for us to reflect on challenges overcome, the pitfalls which surely lie ahead, the successes and accomplishments of our people in myriad

endeavours, and our plans for our Nation's development. We place it all in the hands of Almighty God.

This is as much a time for renewal as it is for reflection. We will renew our commitment to the preservation of our historical legacy in all its various expressions, whether in architecture, culture, literature and the arts. We will build anew and keep pace with the modern world. We will be mindful of our responsibilities to the future, and we will at all times pursue the best interests of our people.

As I close, I ask that the blessings of Almighty God will pour upon our Nation and that He will guide you in your deliberations as you work together in the national interest.

It is, therefore, with great pleasure that I declare the Fourth Session of the Tenth Parliament open.
