

Address to the Nation



by Prime Minister

Dr. the Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell

July 16th 2007

Fellow citizens.

Human frailty often leaves us wanting, when coming to terms with trauma such as the passing of a loved one, a major illness and other tragic circumstances, or events.

Each of us has experienced this to varying degrees. The initial shock or panic triggered by the trauma of a tragedy gives way to other various emotions. With the passage of time, many of us have the capacity to mellow, to accept, and, in essence, get on with our lives. Yet, deep down the hurt remains, the memories linger in our minds, albeit buried.

Such are the circumstances in which our beloved Nation finds itself today. For many citizens, the recent re-sentencing of the 'Grenada 13' that ended with the immediate release of three and the eventual release of the remaining 10 has rekindled mixed feelings. For many, the painful memories have resurfaced. For others it is a time for celebration. But even for them, their joy is not absolute.

And, for some, those permanent scars from the past feel like open wounds once again.

The joy of freedom is countervailed with the pain and trauma of death, fear, mistrust; cluttering the minds of many Grenadians with mixed emotions.

Almost three decades have passed since our precious democracy suffered a tragic blow. The advent of the Revolution signified the end of constitutional rights of our citizens.

Moreover, the heartbreaking events that ended this disruptive period of Grenada's history have left permanent scars.

Every Grenadian alive today, at home and abroad, have reason to walk with pride amongst the citizens of the world in light of the level of compassion they have demonstrated towards those who have done serious harm to the national psyche of our people by murdering former Prime Minister, Maurice Bishop and members of his cabinet and other innocent victims.

We have yet again demonstrated to the world our remarkable capacity for tolerance, endurance and compassion as we received with great quiet dignity and affirmation of respect, the decision of the court to release from prison three (3) members from among the thirteen (13) convicted and sentenced to life in prison.

However, I am very alarmed and disturbed by the attempts by some to romanticize violence and wrong doing by treating those who have committed such acts like so called folk heroes.

We know from contemporary history, that a similar occurrence in other countries of the world would have had a drastically dissimilar outcome.

As I reflected on this most recent development surrounding that bloody day in our history, my mind turned to the most stirring voice to come out of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, who said, and I quote:

"South Africans must recall the terrible past so that we can deal with it, forgiving where forgiveness is necessary but never forgetting."

My fellow Grenadians, ladies and gentlemen, this statement by Nelson Mandela offers tremendous promise to our own situation. For it is my belief that the compassion shown towards the misguided members of the 'Grenada 13' calls into sharp focus the imperative of a serious and sincere response from these three (3) prisoners who have been released.

At this time there is the need to earn the forgiveness of the Grenadian people by open demonstration and proof that they take their rehabilitation seriously and are prepared to respect the decency, the tolerance, the grace under pressure, justice, a sense of fair play and compassion one to another, of the Grenadian people.

Earning the forgiveness of the Grenadian people must begin with a genuine sense of remorse which to date is long in coming. The first conduct in their rehabilitative journey must be the absence of arrogance and gloating in the face of the powerful example of compassion demonstrated by our people.

For while the society has shown great powers of compassion in face of the human tragedy of 1983, the citizenry of this country as human beings still, to this day, carry deep-seated scars and hurt in response to what happened on that fateful day in 1983. We must also never mistake the quiet compassion which our people have demonstrated as an acceptance of the events which have led to the release of the three prisoners.

The silence we hear masks a great conflict of the conspiracy of pain, anguish, heartfelt and enduring sadness, especially for those who are unable to bring closure to their great sense of grief on account of not being able to perform the last decent and final act of goodbye in the tradition to which we have become accustomed as a christian nation. Tonight as I address you, many families and friends of those who lost loved ones during those tragic days, are recalling the tragedy and feeling the pain.

The great burden for the telegraphing of genuine remorse on the part of the 'Grenada 13' that so heavily rest on the shoulders of the Grenadian people, ought not to be taken lightly. We all would like to hear genuine remorse for what has happened and if we can be told why it happened that would even be better.

Additionally and most importantly, those who know what happened to the bodies need to come forward now. This information is vitally important to heal some of the pain that the affected families and friends are experiencing.

Sisters and Brothers, I dream of a Grenada that is in Peace with itself and a Grenada of freedom. Not the kind of freedom that is simply about casting off one's chains. But the freedom which means living in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.

Towards this end, my administration is determined to shape a society and build a nation out of the ruinous past that can stand the litmus test of democratic governance.

Ladies and gentlemen, isn't it ironic that the template against which we are working and have worked, to secure the release of the three prisoners in question, is the RULE OF LAW, the very law which the 'Grenada 13' subverted leading to death and mayhem on an unprecedented scale that has scarred the history of this country forever?

The events of 1983 underscores forcefully the extent to which as a country we were denied the practice of good governance under the weight of which we are pledged in the finest tradition of Westminster-style democracy to practice the principle of being willing as competing political interests to agreeing to disagree agreeably.

So the law having facilitated the release of the three (3) prisoners, it is my hope that they will come to respect the law and the society that has up to now been extremely kind to them and the remaining prisoners. Just as there is no such thing as part-freedom there can be no such thing as part-remorse.

The objective frame of reference provided by the law to secure their release, put an awesome burden on the shoulders of those recently released into the society from prison to indulge mutual respect for their fellow citizens who must be congratulated wholeheartedly for respecting and upholding the rule of law.

This is why I can stand here confidently today and declare that under my watch **never, never, and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one group by another.**

We must buy into the noble idea that this country belongs to all of us and we must find ways to live together even though we may disagree on the specifics of the methodology for nation building. Disagreement over methodology aside however, the one thing we must agree on as a nation is not to have 1983 repeat itself.

I believe that great healing can come from the 'Grenada 13' taking full responsibility for their actions, being willing to respect the angst of those aggrieved.

It behooves the people newly released from prison to fully understand and appreciate this. ..

Today we are more enlightened. Today we are more mature, as a people as a Nation. Experience has shown us that obedience to the rule of law must remain the bedrock of our democracy and the foundation for growth and prosperity.

The use of violence to resolve conflict results in destruction, even self-destruction. There are no winners. Contrition, forgiveness, reconciliation and love are ingredients of our humanity as a people.

Similarly, we need to take more measures to combat violent behaviour. In particular, the growing incidents of youth violence are troubling. Many factors seem to lie at the root of this problem.

Firmness, counselling, family and community support, promoting fulfilling activities and gainful use of talents and skills are all required to address this problem. Your Government has applied some of these tools. More needs to be done.

Perfection is difficult and elusive, but we have to keep working towards it. We must strive to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect.

In closing, I leave you with these words from Ecclesiastes:

"Whatever is has already been, And what will be has been before, And God will call the past to account."