

# **THE CEREMONIAL OPENING OF PARLIAMENT**

MONDAY DECEMBER 6<sup>TH</sup>, 2004

## **THRONE SPEECH**

**DELIVERED BY**

**HIS EXCELLENCY**

**THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

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

**MD**

**AT**

**THE FIFTH SESSION**

**OF**

**THE SEVENTH PARLIAMENT**

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

*December 6th, 2004*

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of the House of Assembly, it is noteworthy that this, the Fifth Session of the Seventh Parliament coincides with the anniversary of our nation's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence. While we, as a people, have achieved much over the past twenty-five years, a great deal still remains to be done. It is both necessary and desirable that our people, at home and abroad, redouble our efforts to accomplish even more over the next twenty-five years. Undeniably, there are unsolved problems from the past and new challenges and dangers, most not of our making, that we must face; but overall, St. Vincent and the Grenadines has not done badly. In fact, we have made great strides.

This Throne Speech is the fourth of this Seventh Parliament. Since 2001, my Government has been focusing its attention on poverty reduction and socio-economic equity,

education, economic growth and fiscal prudence. Special attention has also been given to the fight against HIV/AIDS, the enhancement of public health, housing, the physical infrastructure, good governance, constitutional and administrative reform, the deepening of regional integration, and raising the prestige and effectiveness of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in the international community. In the 2005 fiscal year, my Government will continue to focus on these areas.

In addition to consolidating the existing strategic interventions in the war against poverty and socio-economic inequalities, in 2005 my Government will implement new initiatives to further reduce poverty in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Among these initiatives will be an aggressive programme to foster private sector development, including further support for micro and small enterprises. The private sector, including micro and small

enterprises, has a vital role to play in reducing poverty, improving living standards, and rolling back socio-economic inequalities. Micro credit will be extended through the state financial institutions and the role of the Small Enterprises Development Unit (SEDU) will be enlarged. My Government is very supportive of the United Nations in its Declaration of 2005 as the 'International Year of Micro-Credit.'

This planned focus on private sector development in 2005 requires, among other things, the delivery of the basics of a good investment climate. This my Government labels as "the Basics Plus Campaign for a Good Investment Climate." The "Basics" is to pre-dispose local, regional and foreign business persons to invest; the "Plus", essentially targets strategic interventions, to induce persons to set up business in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. In the process,

my Government says "Yes" to a market economy with appropriate regulation and "No" to a market society.

Mr. Speaker, the Education Revolution now underway in St. Vincent and the Grenadines goes hand in hand with poverty reduction. My Government believes that education is the surest, safest way out of poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment. It subscribes to the view that "the mind is a terrible thing to waste". My Government is well on the way to achieving its goal of universal access to secondary education. This will be a most remarkable achievement. When my Government came to office in 2001, only 39 per cent of persons of secondary school age were attending secondary school; in fact, over the ten year period from 1991-2000, only 343 students, net, were added to the secondary school roll. In the school year 2000-2001 there were 7,269 students at secondary school; today, there are nearly 10,000 students at secondary school. By September 2005, this number will

rise to some 12,000. This achievement resulted from our nation's own material resources and creativity. Thereafter, the challenge will be to consolidate this revolution.

Success has been accomplished in every area of education. Still, there is much more work to be done; particularly in early childhood education, special education, technical and vocational education, and adult literacy. My Government has plans for development in these and other areas of education. One item on the agenda is the National Literacy Crusade planned for 2005. Every adult who is no longer in the formal school system, will be given the opportunity to learn to read and write. I therefore urge: Each one, teach one.

In 2005, My Government will commence the construction of three new secondary schools and three new primary schools. The secondary schools will be built at Barrouallie,

Union Island, and Belair/Fountain. The primary schools will be constructed at Bequia, Edinboro and Fairhall.

In the field of health, my Government will continue with its emphasis on primary and secondary health care, public health, the provision of quality water at low prices, and the fight against HIV/AIDS. The fiscal year 2005 will witness the commencement of the joint World Bank/Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Project valued in excess of 15 million dollars over a three-year period. A major initiative in health involving the Government, the Rotary Club, and a group of American doctors will be the practical elaboration of the efforts to construct a high quality International Children's Hospital in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. To this end, my Government intends to purchase the property on which Windsor Primary School is located. Provisions are made in the Capital Estimates for 2005 for this purchase.

Mr. Speaker, my Government continues to focus on the care, welfare and security of the elderly. Recently, a Golden Years Activity Centre, a joint project between the National Insurance Services and the Government, was formally opened at Golden Groove. Another such Activity Centre at Black Point will be opened in January, 2005. In 2004, the Home Help for the Elderly Programme was expanded and will be further enhanced in 2005. In addition, plans will be unveiled for the practical improvement of geriatric care, generally, and the Lewis Punnett Home, specifically.

Mr. Speaker, the care and development of our children is of especial concern to my Government. The education system, health services and Family Services Department focus very much on the needs of children. Children who live in poverty are provided with public assistance and family income support through the Ministry of Social

Development. The Children Against Poverty Programme, initiated by my Government, continues to be a success. The Liberty Lodge Training Centre is being enlarged and its programmes are being given new life by its leadership, staff and advisory body. Next year, my Government will conclude its review of laws relating to children and the family so as to modernise them and establish further institutional support systems. The problem of "street children", though contained, continues to be worrying. So, too, is the matter of the detention of children under the age of 16 years who have been charged with serious crimes and whose detention is in less than appropriate physical conditions. The Family Services Department continues to be very vigilant and helpful with the so-called "street children" and appropriate accommodation is actively being sought for detained children as an issue of urgency.

My Government is of the view the care and welfare of children is fundamentally a parental matter and parents must thus shoulder their responsibilities. The State will, of course, always lend a helping hand.

Mr. Speaker, the production sectors of agriculture, fisheries, tourism, energy, construction, financial services, information technology among others, will in 2005 continue to receive the utmost attention to ensure their further development.

In each of these productive sectors, the Estimates for 2005 reflect my Government's focus on enhanced production and economic growth. For example, the productive sectors, narrowly-defined, are allocated 16 per cent of the Capital Budget; a further 37.9 per cent is allocated to transportation and communications, which are themselves either directly part of the productive sectors or linked inextricably.

Mr. Speaker, legislative and institutional support for the productive sectors will be provided in my Government's legislative programme for 2005. Accordingly, the following Bills, among others, will be brought o Parliament:

- (1) The National Tourism Authority Bill;
- (2) A reconfigured Tourism Standards Bill;
- (3) The Tourism Incentives Bill;
- (4) The Electronic Transaction's Bill; and
- (5) The Small Business Development Bill.

Institutional development will be coming, too, in several areas of the productive sectors including the following:

- (1) The establishment of the National Parks, Rivers and Beaches Authority to oversee the development and management of all designated parks, recreational sites and tourism attractions within its ambit;

- (2) The restructuring of the management and oversight systems of the Tobago Cays;
- (3) The setting up of new management structures for the modern Kingstown Fish Market and the Bequia Fisheries Centre;
- (4) The revamping of the existing structures at the Marketing Corporation relative to the marketing of agricultural produce;
- (5) The creative fusion of the Development Bank structures with those of the National Commercial Bank; and
- (6) The continued development of an array of state institutions and agencies which have been

established or reformed since my Government came to office in 2001.

Mr. Speaker, my Government will continue to promote and provide practical assistance to sports, the creative arts and culture. In 2005, a Sports Policy and Action Plan will be further elaborated; the construction of the National Stadium is on-going; the rehabilitation of the Arnos Vale Sports Complex at a cost of \$21 million will move speedily ahead; and the Sports Foundation will be further strengthened.

In the field of culture, the extraordinary developmental work will proceed apace at every level of our society. The appropriate physical facilities are being built and will continue to be built; one such facility is the Modern Library and Lecture Theatre. In 2005, the National Cultural Policy will be finalised and published; a National Museum and Art

Gallery Bill will be taken to Parliament; and a National Dance Company will be established. Moreover, the reclamation of our nation's rich history, within the context of our ennobling Caribbean civilisation, will continue apace.

Mr. Speaker, my Government has pledged to be "tough on crime and the causes of crime" and this commitment will not waver. Generally, while the crime rate is falling, the rate of violent crimes is rising. My Government realises that crime, and more especially, violent crime, is a multi-faceted issue. It therefore remains focused, firm and determined that no space will be given to criminals, especially those who are violent. The full force of the law will be brought to bear on those persons who are convicted by the courts.

In this regard, my Government is strengthening the Police Force by implementing reforms, and facilitating improvements in the areas of equipment, intelligence gathering and analysis, work conditions and physical infrastructure. With respect to the latter, in the 2005 Capital Estimates, provision is made for the construction of new Police Stations at Biabou, Canouan and Questelles. Provisions are also made for the rehabilitation of the Police Stations at Georgetown, Sandy Bay, Old Montrose, and Union Island. Plans are also being made for the purchase of two mobile Police Stations. All this is in addition to the rebuilding of the Police Stations at Owia and Rose Hall. Never in the history of St. Vincent and the Grenadines has so much work been done on the Police Stations. Still, as always, there is much more to be done.

The Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is currently the Chairman of the Regional Security

System(RSS). In that capacity, he will be overseeing the reform of the RSS and the fashioning of Memoranda of Understanding on Security Matters with Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Jamaica. Security benefits will redound accordingly to St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Passport security, to meet international standards, will be effected with the start-up of the Machine Readable Passport Project, at a cost of \$1.8 million.

In 2005, too, the modernisation of the Coast Guard will be well on its way. A new Coast Guard vessel is to be purchased and a project for the overhaul of existing Coast Guard vessels, at a cost of \$1.73 million, will commence.

Mr. Speaker, massive airport developments are in store for St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The construction of the Canouan Jet Airport will start by mid-2005; the short-term

rehabilitation of E.T. Joshua will commence next year; improvements will be made to the J F Mitchell Airport in Bequia, and the Union Island Airport. By July 2005, my Government is expected to be in a position to announce the financing arrangements and construction schedule for the International Airport to be built at Argyle.

Mr. Speaker, next week, my Government is expected to publish the Population and Housing Census Report for 2001. Shortly thereafter, under section 32(1) of the Constitution of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, I shall be appointing a Constituency Boundaries Commission. This is a constitutional requirement consequent upon the holding of a Population Census.

My Government is pledged to continue on its good governance path of deepening democracy and freedom, public accountability, openness and transparency, and

structured hostility to official corruption. In the year 2005, the work of the Constitutional Reform Commission and the Commission on Local government is expected to be concluded as part of the on-going process to effect constitutional change and local government reform. Further, in 2005, my Government will introduce in Parliament the Integrity Bill and the Anti-Corruption Bill. As always, my Government keeps the promises made in its Election Manifesto in a timely manner, so long as there is no reasonable basis upon which to avoid action.

Mr. Speaker, my Government, as is well-known, is in the forefront of deepening Caribbean integration. It will redouble its efforts in this regard in both the OECS and CARICOM. My Government's commitment to the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) is unwavering. And St. Vincent and the Grenadines will be CSME-ready in keeping with its obligations. Further, my

Government is exploring the possibilities of a closer union with the Governments of Grenada, and Trinidad and Tobago. It is a prudent step which deserves the public's support, at least in principle, at first.

In Foreign Affairs, my Government continues to be active and is constantly working to lift the prestige of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in the international community and it takes its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations very seriously. My government will continue to pursue its foreign policy in a principled manner which is consistent with the permanent interests of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, it is now my pleasure and honour to declare the Fifth Session of the Seventh Parliament open. Thank you and May God Bless us all.