

# Mutual support in times of need

By HON KEITH MITCHELL

PRIME MINISTER, GRENADA



KEITH MITCHELL is serving his third term in office as Prime Minister of Grenada since he first took office in June 1995. Dr Mitchell was Chairperson of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States from May 2000 to January 2002 and was Chairperson of the Ministerial Council of the Association of Caribbean States from 1996-97. Before entering politics, Dr Mitchell was a professor of Mathematics at Howard University, Washington DC, USA, from 1977-83.

Grenada, as a member of the voluntary association of 53 independent sovereign states that comprise the Commonwealth, and in cooperation as outlined in the Singapore Declaration, is delighted to make its contribution to this special CHOGM edition of FIRST.

Grenada, as a Small Island Developing State, is moving into a local and foreign investment-based economy to achieve economic diversification, sustainable economic growth, and increased employment and prosperity for all its citizens. The Government and people of our blessed “Spice Isle” are forever grateful to the Commonwealth for the invaluable help afforded us.

Following the widespread destruction by hurricane Ivan in September 2004, the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation responded to Grenada’s needs in a variety of ways, providing personnel and expertise during the Country’s greatest time of need.

We are grateful for the variety of timely and invaluable services that include: the development of a Maintenance Programme, a National Strategic Development Plan, a conservation plan for the town of St George, the coordination of donor support, the Government’s physical reconstruction initiatives, the drafting of new legislation, the improvement of the operational efficiency of the Physical Planning Unit, and the economic aspects of livestock production, to name a few.

The process of the ten-year National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP), which is designed to ensure more efficient long-term planning, is being realised. The involvement of a wide range of stakeholders and interest groups, including political parties and Parliamentarians, has mobilised support for an undertaking that the society had long called for, but was slow in coming.

Recognising that the Physical Planning Unit (PPU) required substantive institutional strengthening and other forms of support, the Agency for Reconstruction and Development (ARD) turned to the Commonwealth Fund for technical cooperation in order to advance the planning and development process in Grenada with specific attention on the Unit.

The chances of inadvertently or even intentionally destroying valued historic structures often increase in the wake of widespread destruction such as that caused by hurricane Ivan. With justifiable focus on rebuilding schools and health facilities, and attending to pressing housing needs, coupled by an eagerness to complete

the clean-up process with the removal of debris, limited financial resources can force delays in the restoration of architectural icons.

The Government, in recognition of the intrinsic value of the Nation’s historic and cultural buildings and sites, sought specific assistance from the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation that would facilitate structural restoration in keeping with international standards.

On the basis of the Commonwealth and its objectives, it is important to note that the Commonwealth union is neither a political or military alliance. The challenge however, is to create a more fruitfully balanced economic alliance. The Commonwealth has always been a blend of highly developed economies and a significant portion of the world’s poorer countries who seek to achieve agreement by consensus. Over the years, this objective has been sometimes difficult to achieve.

Initially, the Commonwealth idea was to form a significant economic bloc. Therefore each country accorded each other’s goods to their markets on the basis of ‘Commonwealth Preference’ as well as a free right of migration. The harsh reality is that the privileged access is a thing of the past but the social consequences remain an issue. Left behind, are substantial communities with family ties in other Commonwealth countries. Consequently, people in one Commonwealth country retain preferences for goods and services from another - so that even without the tariff privileges, trade within the Commonwealth continues.

Today, many Commonwealth members look increasingly to regional partners, non-Commonwealth as well as Commonwealth, to form their critically important alliances. However, the fact remains that shared legal, economic, and governmental traditions give its members a common outlook that is not always shared with regional partners.

In spite of the multiplicity of uphill challenges, particularly the ongoing recovery from successive hurricanes, Grenada has laid the infrastructural foundation and is preparing the Information Communications Technology (ICT) apparatus that is attracting major investment initiatives. Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) – combined public-private investment – is also a major ingredient. Grenada is mindful of the required legal, regulatory, and procedural reforms (designed within the OECS context) to move the investment environment towards world-class status.