



**National Address by
Dr. the Right Honourable Keith Mitchell
Prime Minister, Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique
Grenada's preparation for COVID-19
March 03, 2020**

Fellow Grenadians, the world is faced with a likely pandemic and despite the valiant efforts of Ministry of Health and the Ministry of National Security, through frontline staff at our air and sea ports, it is most likely that the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) will reach our shores. The Government of Grenada assures you that all the necessary measures are being taken to safeguard the people of this country against the Coronavirus outbreak. However, we must also accept our individual responsibility for helping to curb the potential spread of the disease.

The outbreak has now spread far beyond the People's Republic of China, despite decisive actions taken by that country's Government. The latest Situation Report from the World Health Organisation (WHO), indicates that the disease is now present in 64 countries outside of China, with close to 89,000 cases confirmed globally.

With cases now being reported within the region, the reality of the situation is no longer if COVID-19 will reach our shores, it is more likely, simply a matter of time before it reaches.

Government's measures must be complemented by individual actions to follow the advice of health experts, as it relates to proper cough, sneeze and hand-washing practices. Accepting individual responsibility in this scenario, might also require some temporary adjustments of our cultural norms and religious practices, so that we do not enable the spread of the virus.

I must commend workers on the frontline of this effort – staff from the Ministry of Health and workers at the various ports of entry - for the remarkable job they have done thus far in implementing the heightened health screening measures to ensure the safety of all. I have acknowledged their dedication to serving their country, but I also feel compelled to

do so publicly, so that you are aware that everything possible is being done to prepare our country and our people.

Notwithstanding their committed efforts, the changing global scenario means the time has come for us to do more and we are committed to doing just that. I stress here again, the need for you, the people to be fully engaged in this fight against the virus.

Intense discussions have been taking place among relevant stakeholders and Government has now made available an additional \$2 million to bolster our COVID-19 preparedness actions.

We will not spare any effort in ensuring that all the necessary measures are in place to protect our country and therefore, we stand prepared to increase that figure if it becomes necessary, as the situation unfolds. These are significant resources and we must demonstrate full accountability in all that we do.

The Minister of Health will provide greater details on some of the more specific actions that are being taken to safeguard our country, but we are investing heavily in the procurement of additional medical, and other supplies to further equip our hospitals and community health centres, and outfit the treatment centres that are being established. Schools are also being provided with significant supplies, such as thermometers, to help identify symptoms of the virus. There is also ongoing training of medical practitioners, other frontline staff and at-risk groups, including hotel workers and educators.

To complement these and other critical actions, several policy level decisions have been taken.

- A COVID-19 Coordinator, in the person of Dr. George Mitchell, has been appointed to manage the activities of all stakeholders, as they relate to the disease.
- The Sanitary Authority has been activated under the Acting Chief Medical Officer and is responsible for directing and mandating all technical-related activities relevant to COVID-19.
- The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of National Security, are further strengthening our border control efforts, ensuring that all measures relating to port health, surveillance, screening and other necessary procedures, are continued.
- Additional supplies of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) are being purchased to ensure that persons on the frontline of the preventive effort are properly protected and their level of exposure is minimal. We have also obtained thousands

of masks, some of which are being distributed to our students in China, and arrangements are being made to transport the remainder to Grenada.

- The Ministry of Education will work in collaboration with the Ministry of Health to ensure that teachers and students are equipped with basic information about preventing the spread of the virus by practicing proper cough, sneeze and hand-washing techniques. Similar exercises will be conducted with elements of the private and public sectors.

Additionally, the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank has indicated that it is prepared to procure equipment on behalf of member states, as part of its contribution to the fight against the virus.

CARICOM has also agreed, in collaboration with the cruise ship industry, to a set of minimum protocols for cruise ships. We are confident that through such collaborative actions, we will minimise the potential impact on our country and region.

This combination of local and regional measures will help to strengthen other critical actions, which have so far proven effective in keeping the disease out of Grenada. The Importation Transmission Watch announced last week, remains in full effect and we are strictly enforcing the mandatory quarantine of persons entering Grenada from at-risk countries. Just yesterday, a private aircraft was denied entry because of the potential exposure of some of its passengers. It is clear that Government will not intentionally put the people of this country at risk, despite propaganda to the contrary.

The time has clearly come for us to move past the ban imposed on persons specifically coming from China because the disease is now present in more than 60 countries around the world. The threat becomes even greater now because evidently, not all countries are enforcing strict measures to protect their borders, therefore, we must continue to do all that is necessary to safeguard our country and our people.

I must reiterate that while Government is fulfilling its responsibility to prepare, it is our individual actions relative to personal hygiene and our interaction with others, that will be most effective in curbing the spread of the virus. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the tips shared by health agencies; such as washing your hands thoroughly and regularly; covering your mouth and nose fully when you cough or sneeze; maintaining a safe distance from persons who are sneezing or coughing; staying at home if you feel unwell and seeking immediate medical attention if you experience flu-like symptoms.

Sisters and brothers, particularly the parents, relatives and friends of our students in China, I assure you that the Government of Grenada continues to care about their well-being, particularly those who are located in Wuhan, the epicenter of the outbreak.

The evacuation of students is one of the actions being considered but we must carefully examine what is most feasible, the logistics of evacuation, the risks and the benefits. At this stage, we are satisfied that our students are well looked after, and that everything is being done for their protection. However, we also accept that this is a fluid situation, and we will continue to remain engaged in all aspects. Government, through the ambassador and embassy in Beijing continues to provide all possible support to the students during this critical time.

It must be noted here that recent WHO statistics show that while the virus is spreading in other regions, the People's Republic of China appears to now have it under control, showing a decreasing number of cases daily. The Government of Grenada acknowledges and thanks them for their efforts and looks forward to continued engagement and cooperation with them, through our embassies here and in Beijing.

Before I conclude, I must address the troubling issue of misinformation and propaganda. Some elements in our country, are deliberately using these tactics to incite fear and panic at a time when persons are already concerned about their health and mortality. There are credible sources of information available and I encourage you to use them.

In fact, I want to echo the sentiments of the Director General of the World Health Organisation who spoke recently of an "infodemic," given the rapid spread of misinformation via social media and other platforms. He said, "Our greatest enemy right now is not the virus itself. It's fear, rumours and stigma. And our greatest assets are facts, reason and solidarity." Therefore, my fellow Grenadians, be guided by the facts of the science, not the sensationalism of rumours.

Sisters and brothers, we are facing a potential national crisis and that requires all hands on deck, working genuinely towards a solution that protects us all. As Prime Minister, I have an abounding faith in the resilience of this nation and its people. We have faced many medical challenges in the past – from dengue fever outbreaks to Zika and Chikungunya. Together, we have also faced natural disasters. On each occasion, through unity, focus and discipline, we have always come through better and stronger. Through the grace of God, and your resilience - We will again!

The God, whom we all serve, will continue to richly bless our nation and protect us all.

I thank you.