

**2003/04 SPEECH FROM THE THRONE**  
**TUESDAY 23 SEPTEMBER 2003**  
**Delivered by**  
**HIS EXCELLENCY GOVERNOR JAMES POSTON, CBE**  
**To the**  
**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**Greetings**

Mr. Speaker, on the occasion of the first Budget Session for the New Administration, I am pleased to bring greetings to the people of these '*Beautiful by Nature Islands*.' I also would like to congratulate the new government and wish them much success. On this occasion, I would like to thank the former government for their stewardship of the Islands during a time in which the country came of age.

My government is committed to building a Turks and Caicos Islands where all of us are free, protected and are allowed to live our lives in pursuit of our dreams. The government is committed to ensuring that the benefits of development are spread equally to Turks and Caicos Islanders. My government will chart a course where people can aspire to and fulfill their potential. In the end, my government is committed to building a confident nation that is at peace with itself and the world – a nation whose people believe in themselves and who, in their entrepreneurial, professional and other daily pursuits, are energized by dignity and national pride.

Mr. Speaker, the new government will have to achieve its mandate for change in an increasingly globalized world. Globalization will bring new opportunities for small economies such as ours. However, to embrace these opportunities require proactive government policies and the collective input of all whether we are in the public or private sector. Mr. Speaker, I am confident that the people of these Islands have the talent and national commitment to continue to prosper in the times ahead.

## **Policies and Programmes 2003 - 2007**

My government was elected with a mandate for change! My government accepts this mandate with humility and a commitment to work diligently on behalf of all the people of the Islands.

Mr. Speaker, my government has already embarked on the process of change. During its first week in office, it increased the monthly old age pension from \$130.00 to \$200.00; and effective 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2003, the customs duty exemptions applied to residents returning home by air will be increased to \$400.00. I am pleased therefore to briefly outline some of the policies and programmes my government has planned for key areas of our national life to deliver its mandate for change over the next few years.

### **ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT**

Despite significant economic growth recently, the fiscal position of the government has weakened over the last few years. My government recognizes the need to stabilize public sector finances by addressing the structural imbalance between available revenue and expenditure programmes. My government sees the main short term economic management priority as being the need to replenish our reserves to meet its obligation under the prudent borrowing guidelines agreed with Her Majesty's Government. This will also give the Islands the ability to better withstand shocks due to economic downturn or natural disasters.

As part of its economic management, my government will implement a programme of budget reform and will continue to invest in new accounting systems to improve policy formulation. My government will carefully consider joint ventures and set limits on debt accumulation. Consistent with this objective, all joint venture proposals will be subject to proper tendering and full appraisals. A preference will be given to seeking loans from international development banks, such as the Caribbean Development Bank and the European Investment Bank.

The development of a sound financial system and well-functioning prudential supervisory arrangements are important determinants of real growth in any economy. This is why my government will formulate a ten-year economic plan that will ensure the orderly development of our islands. The government will consult the private sector and other community groups during the formulation of the economic plan. To ensure its implementation, the economic plan will be the basis of future budgets and departmental work plans.

In addition, my government will maintain high regulatory standards to ensure the integrity of the Financial Services Industry while developing and marketing new products and services; introduce laws to launch the E-commerce industry in the islands as well as to introduce a National Bank.

My government's economic diversification programme will also embrace expanding the agriculture and fisheries sectors. To ensure that tourism led development is spread across the entire country, my government will establish a Hotel Corporation to take the initial risk of building hotels in the less developed islands.

## **GOOD GOVERNANCE AND CONSTITUTIONAL ADVANCEMENT**

My government is committed to ensuring that the Turks and Caicos Islands remains a representative democracy that is of the people, by the people and for the people. My government is therefore committed to an aggressive legislative agenda and will pass legislations in several areas of our national life, including the area of electoral reform. My government will also pass anti-corruption legislation; decisions concerning the award of government contracts will be made on the basis of merit; and Ministers will be truthful and will not mislead the Legislative Council. My government is also committed to ensuring the proper functioning of the offices of the Ombudsman and the Complaints Commissioner.

My government is committed to a process of Constitutional advancement for the Islands. We welcome the outcome of the Constitutional Review Committee which will be reviewed to form the basis of our initial efforts for more governmental responsibilities to be transferred to elected officials. In the long run, in keeping with the growing financial strength of the Islands and the needs and aspiration of our people, my government will negotiate with Her Majesty's Government to achieve our goal of full internal self-government.

## **NATIONAL SECURITY AND IMMIGRATION**

My government is concerned over the level of crime recorded in the Islands recently. We believe it is the inalienable right of our people to live their lives and pursue their dreams in a society free of crime. This is why we will provide the necessary funding to strengthen the Royal Turks and Caicos Islands Police Force and enact new laws to stem the tide of criminal activity.

Critical to our national security is the need to stem the flow of illegal drugs into our country. This problem is also related to the influx of illegal immigrants from neighboring countries. My government will therefore work with these countries and the United States authorities to strengthen Operation Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands (OPBAT) and increase inter agency cooperation and intelligence exchange between our Customs, Immigration and Police services.

As part of a new immigration strategy, my government will work to create an investment climate which promotes the interest of both investors and Turks and Caicos Islanders. My government will embrace and welcome other nationalities who share our vision of putting *Turks and Caicos Islanders First* and those who understand that our people must grow commensurate with the growth in our country. To this end, my government has already set up a Blue Ribbon Commission to review the Immigration Ordinance and Immigration Policy to make them clear, firm and fair.

My government views improvements in safety and security at our air and sea ports as being vital to our national security. The government has therefore undertaken a consultancy to identify the projects and policies which are needed to comply with the new requirements of the International Civil Aviation Authority. We are committed to implementing the recommendations of this study in a timely manner. We will also undertake projects to improve our network of seaports, which will also address security concerns. These interventions will ensure that our transport sector remains an important contributor to our overall national development. My government recognizes the importance of a domestic fire service and is committed to expanding it with the support of the private sector, as necessary.

The Islands narrowly escaped the ravages of Hurricane Isabel, which caused severe disruption and loss of lives along the eastern seaboard of the United States. My government is therefore committed to effective disaster mitigation and recovery programmes at both the government and household levels. This is consistent with our overall national security objectives. As such we will work to continue strengthening of the Office of Disaster Management and implementation of the Disaster Plan. We will also be supportive of regional initiatives, including those with the other United Kingdom Overseas Territories.

## **PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY**

Mr. Speaker, my government is committed to an expansion of the public sector to meet the development needs of the Islands. It is not committed to reducing the size of the civil service but to undertaking a review of the civil service salaries to increase competitiveness with those paid in the private sector. This review should take place by the end of the financial year. Our intention is to increase our ability to attract, retain and promote qualified Turks and Caicos Islanders to positions of high importance.

The Public Sector Modernization Programme will be continued, with emphasis being placed on achieving objectives and outputs. My government's efforts will also embrace appropriate personnel policies, outsourcing of services where feasible and the aggressive

use of technology to improve productivity. The government also plans to promote capacity building programmes within the civil service and to deepen the performance appraisal process that has already begun. These initiatives will be accompanied by regular assessments of the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery.

## **EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY**

My government is concerned that despite recent economic growth, Turks and Caicos Islanders are being marginalized. Consistent with our policies to put '*Turks and Caicos Islanders First*', to protect our people from unfair competition and to promote Turks and Caicos Islanders in business, my government will seek to establish a Turks and Caicos Islands Protection Board. My government will also amend the Business Licensing Ordinance to provide for a category of businesses to be reserved for Turks and Caicos Islanders and Turks and Caicos Islands only. In addition, my government will enhance existing programmes in the areas of health, education and small business development that are essential to empowering our people. Social safety-net programmes will be established to protect the less fortunate members of our society to ensure that no one is left behind.

My government is committed to ensuring that all people of our islands live productive lives and therefore we will seek to implement measures to improve the quality of life for the entire population. Social security programmes for the elders, who are the guardians of our heritage, will be reviewed and expanded. In addition, programmes for the physically and mentally challenged will be expanded.

## **SOCIAL SECTOR MANAGEMENT**

Mr. Speaker, social sector programmes are major contributors to our overall development as a nation and people. This will require that my government review and expand programmes in the areas of education, sports, youth, culture, health, HIV/AIDS reduction and gender affairs.

My government sees education as a life long process that should be provided ‘*from the womb to the tomb.*’ To this end, programmes at all levels of the education system will be reviewed and expanded to embrace modern management techniques. In keeping with our international obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children residing legally in this country will have access to an education. However, non-Belongers will have to pay a fee to subsidise the cost of their education. In addition, scholarship programmes will be assessed to make them more objective. To contain costs in this area, my government will explore partnering arrangements with overseas institutions in North America and the United Kingdom, whereby in exchange for a specific sum, a number of places will be reserved for our students.

Mr. Speaker, our nation has had an ongoing debate concerning our health care needs. In this area, my government will engage specialist skills to plan a National Health Insurance Programme and implement guidelines for the construction of appropriately sized health care facilities on Grand Turk and Providenciales. In addition, systems, procedures, staff development and cost recovery programmes will form part of the changes my government will introduce. Emphasis will also be placed on primary health care provision and complementary private sector involvement in HIV/AIDS and Drug reduction programmes. In addition, adequate funding will be provided to expand programmes in the areas of youth, sports, culture and gender affairs.

## **TOURISM, INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. Speaker, proper infrastructure is vital if economic growth is to take place in the Turks and Caicos Islands. Infrastructural development is one of the core mandates of my government. My government is committed to undertaking infrastructure projects that will benefit all of the Islands. Our efforts to improve infrastructure provision in a timely manner will be enhanced by strengthening the Public Works Department and the creation of an Infrastructure Development Fund as a special fund under the Finance and Audit Ordinance.

My government is committed to fully exploiting the potential of tourism by putting in place proper management mechanisms while maintaining the country's environmental integrity. As part of the economic plan, a tourism master plan will be formulated and implemented for a more effective tourism industry. The main focus of the plan is to make the sector much more competitive and flexible to minimize the effects of external and internal shocks. In this regard, the following initiatives, among others, will be undertaken:

- Establishment of a Hotel Training School;
- Increase effectiveness of the Tourist Board, and Diversification into the European and Asian Markets;
- Increased joint marketing and promotional efforts by TCInvest and the Tourist Board;
- Product development and integration of the local culture.

Mr. Speaker, preservation and protection of the environment is of utmost importance to my government and our tourism led-development strategy, therefore we are committed to investing more money in the cleaning up of the streets and other public areas in our communities; enacting stiffer penalties for littering; implementing new ways for the proper management of marine resources; and the revitalization of our National Parks System. My government also reaffirms its commitment to the Environment Charter agreed to with Her Majesty's Government.

My government's environmental management programmes will also embrace the development of a proper solid waste collection and disposal plan. As part of our new approach to Physical Planning, my Government will ensure that all major development projects are subjected to proper Environment Impact Assessments, which will be carried out with the input of stakeholders. My government is also committed to proper management of the Conservation Fund.

## **Conclusion**

Mr. Speaker, my government has outlined a very ambitious development agenda, which it aims to implement in a pragmatic manner based on the availability of resources. Successful implementation of these programmes and policies will continue current prosperity and ensure sustainable development of the Islands for us and future generations of Turks and Caicos Islanders. My government invites the public to hold it accountable as it works to implement the programmes and policies outlined above.

Thank you all for your attention and may God bless these Turks and Caicos Islands.