

Welcome and remarks
Delivered at the Accountability Workshop of the
ST. Vincent and the Grenadines chapter of the Caribbean Growth forum
on Wednesday April, 30th, 2014 by
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Hon Minister of Tourism and Culture: Colleagues from the World Bank and other collaborating partners, Mr. Wayne Mitchell, IMF sub-regional Head, invited guests, ladies and gentlemen:

I have been asked by the organizers of this Accountability Workshop to make welcoming remarks. There are not many people I know who would shy away from an easy task. Accordingly, I am pleased to welcome you to this Accountability Workshop.

In this country, we regularly have workshops and seminars and conferences of various types, but it is unusual to hear of us having an Accountability Workshop. In the private sector, they make investments and take risks, if things go bad or do not work out; there is hardly any mention of it. We might simply see a business closing down or downsizing or a merger; we might speculate that the investment did not go so well, but that is about that. Certainly, if the business venture is successful, it continues, but there is not too much shouting there either; perhaps

because businesses are not particularly interested in attracting the attention of the Comptroller of Inland Revenue and his staff.

The public sector is not different (some may say its worse) when it comes to accountability. Things happen at a pace all their own and no one is ever called upon to be accountable. Take for example the South Leeward Road rehabilitation Project which is financed with a loan from the Caribbean Development Bank; and which we were told last week in a press release, will enter its construction phase in June of this year. This project was launched in October last year. Has any one given an account or explained to the people of this country, why it has taken this long to get to this point? Look too at the financial complex, the heart of the Government. In 2011, nearly three years ago an entire floor space in that building became uninhabitable because of a fire (this is dear to my heart because it destroyed the census data that were housed there), yet, today, that valuable floor space remains unusable, while we rent and/or are inconvenienced due to lack of space, and no one is explaining why the rehabilitative works are not complete or indeed, when they will be completed. Accountability is clearly not the hallmark of the public sector, but we want to change that.

That is why we have embraced this methodology of accountability, and that is the reason we are having this Accountability Workshop today. You may recall that at the launch of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines' Chapter of the Caribbean Growth Forum in late 2012, we signaled our support for the CGF, which aims to bring together a diverse array of professional, technical, skilled and semi-skilled individuals and organizations from the private and public sectors to talk to each other. Not to talk at one another, but rather to talk to; to see how in dialoging around the issues that are pivotal to growth and development we can actually help to promote that growth.

Another reason why I am pleased to welcome you to this Accountability workshop is because I am always delighted when we are able to demonstrate both cohesiveness and coherence between our strategies. The overarching objective of the CGF is to promote growth in the member countries. I am sure that you recognize immediately, the connection of this objective to the goals articulated by the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in its recently launched National Economic and Social Development Plan.

The first of those goals is: “re-engineering economic growth”.

Parenthetically, I might add that the other four are: 2. Enabling Increased Human and Social Development; 3. Promoting Good Governance and

Increasing the Effectiveness of Public Administration; 4.Improving Physical Infrastructure, Preserving the Environment and Building Resilience to Climate Change; and the fifth is Building National Pride, Identity and Culture.

So having launched the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Chapter of the Caribbean Growth Forum and commenced the dialogue; this workshop now aims to take the process a bit further by giving a public account of the progress. We in the public sector and our partners in the private sector have taken a deep breath, and we are opening our windows for all to see inside of our homes. The panoramic view which you now have reveals to you the public some of the difficulties and challenges that we face on an on-going basis. You may not have hitherto understood why it takes months to deliver on any planned intervention. Today, you will get an opportunity to see some of the intricacies involved. You may hopefully appreciate the fact that money is often not the only or even, the main constraint to progress. The coordination and the management of myriad processes demand more than money and time; astute leadership and visioning are quintessential elements.

What we signal by this Accountability workshop is that we are prepared to take stock of where we are and we are open for suggestions as to how

some of these delays can be turned around. We hope too that you will applaud those green lights where they exist.

So, as I welcome you to this workshop, I know that you are looking forward to the presentation of the dashboard. The three thematic areas for us today are: Logistics and connectivity; Investment climate and skills and productivity. You will see how we have progressed and you may be able to help us identify solutions where problems exist.

In addition to these three arrears, we also have a special session on unemployment in the Caribbean with particular emphasis on St. Vincent and the Grenadines. That is a worrying area for us, and we are very much focused on how it can be addressed.

So welcome, welcome, welcome, and we look forward to your interest and active participation.

Thank you for your kind attention and all I look forward to a productive Accountability Workshop.