

A:JPAS Retrospective

We Proudly Share the Noble Dreams of Martin and Malcolm

a speech by
Maurice R. Bishop
Prime Minister, People's Revolutionary Government of Grenada
delivered to the Sixth Annual Dinner of TransAfrica,
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An unidentified woman and men with Maurice R. Bishop in Grenada
Photo Source: Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico 1980s

Maurice Rupert Bishop (May 29, 1944-October 19, 1983) was a politician and revolutionary in the island nation of Grenada in the southeastern division of the Caribbean Sea who became Prime Minister after a coup by the New Jewel Movement in 1979 removed Eric Gairy from office, and thereafter, Bishop served as Prime Minister of the People's Revolutionary Government of Grenada until 1983, until he was overthrown in another coup, and executed.

First, I want to thank Mayor Marion Barry and the people of Washington DC for the presentation of the keys to your historic city. This honour to the government and people of Grenada is something that we will always cherish. I am greatly honoured, and greatly moved, to find myself here tonight in the presence of a gathering such as this one; a gathering of some of the finest sons and daughters of the heroic Black American people.

To you I bring greetings from the government and people of our small, brave and freedom-loving island nation of Grenada. I also wish to congratulate you on this your 6th Annual Dinner and to express my pleasure for the opportunity to share these precious moments with you.

Your history and ours have at times been so closely intertwined as to be near inseparable. We can point to Caribbean-American figures such as Marcus Garvey, for while he was born in the Caribbean, he has spent many of his more productive years living and working in the USA.

By the same token, our Harry Belafonte is also your Harry Belafonte. Many, many eminent and distinguished black Americans are Caribbean-born or of Caribbean parentage. We point to a few examples such as Malcolm X and Sidney Poitier, Kwame Toure (formerly known as Stokely Carmichael), and Cicely Tyson.

In fact in the case of Malcolm, his mother came from a small village in Grenada, called La Digue. It is certain that some of you here tonight also share this distinction of Caribbean-American heritage.

The history, the problems and the aspirations of the masses of people of Africa, the Caribbean and Black America are extraordinarily similar. And that is why TransAfrica is an organisation with so much meaning and relevance to us all. Tonight, I salute the policies and recommendations that TransAfrica has initiated and the work accomplished on behalf of the people of Africa and the Caribbean.

Indeed, tonight's event is a timely testimony of your tenacity, your fierce independence and judgement of will and your dedication to justice, equality and freedom for us in the developing world. Consistent with the above, we are certainly happy to endorse TransAfrica's recommendations of June 1982, that the United States, given its immense leverage with South Africa, should adopt a policy of escalating economic and political sanctions against that country with the aim of bringing about an end to apartheid and the independence of Namibia.

The links between our people and the 30 million Black people of America go far back into the chronicles of the European assault on our ancestral land and our common struggle against racist oppression and the enforced transportation of our ancestors to the Americas.

The struggle of the Black American people has been a constant source of inspiration to the liberation struggles of the peoples of the world. In every corner of the earth where people are struggling or have struggled to win their freedom, the names of your great leaders are honoured, and people draw strength from your struggles and your victories.

We know the role that the example of your fighters and the ideas of your thinkers have played in the liberation of their ancestral country, Africa. No one can deny the influence of people like W.E. Dubois. Paul Robeson, Langston Hughes and Martin Luther King, on the awakening of the political consciousness of Africa.

The independence movements in Africa sprang directly out of the Pan African Movement, which in turn, owed a great deal to the spread of liberation ideology from Black America and the Caribbean.

As regard Black America and the Caribbean, your fighting history has had a most significant bearing upon the course of Caribbean history, bringing with it an interesting interaction, a cross-fertilisation of our two destinies.

I must also say that our country, Grenada, with the same fierce determination as that of African states and Black America, has embraced Africa's number one priority: full, unconditional liberation and self-determination for Southern Africa. In the exercise of this embrace and endearment of Africa, thousands of our people have warmly received in Grenada President Kenneth Kaunda. President Samora Machel, and Sister Sally Mugabe - the courageous and inspirational wife of President Mugabe and a leader in her own right.

Let me also, at this time, reiterate our firmest support for the African National Congress (ANC), the representative political organisation of the black people of South Africa and SWAPO, the authentic representative of the Namibian people.

Let me also restate our conviction that the government and people of Mozambique will defeat the aggressions against them and that the government and people of Angola will continue to consolidate their revolutionary process.

But sisters and brothers, to be very open and frank, what worries us about the Southern African struggle is not just the brutal, aggressive and expansionist policies of South Africa, but also the attitude of the powerful USA administration to the conditions of misery and suffering in that part of the world.

The warm and friendly relations between the United States and South African governments in defiance of the UN is really an affront to humanity. The open hostility of the United States administration to Grenada, while at the same time embracing South Africa, underlines the serious hypocrisy of the present Administration and has painted an image that does no justice to the greatness of the American people.

In Central America what we are experiencing is the extension of the same attitude that again negates the interests and aspirations of the people of this region and the course of history. After all, the entire region, including the USA, has had a history of struggle for independence and freedom from domination. How can the American Revolution and war of independence be ever forgotten? Revolutionary upheavals in Central America and the Caribbean today are only the continuation of these struggles, with different forms in some respects, but fundamentally the same in essence: 'the struggle for National Liberation, Peace and Justice.' Because this is so, the question arises: What is the way forward in these troubled parts? We in all honesty think that only the people of Central America can solve their problems.

Contadora, the much debated initiative, advanced by Mexico, Panama, Venezuela and Colombia must be seen as a step in the right direction, and therefore given the fullest support.

Recognition of the right of the people of Central America to themselves solve their problems through dialogue and negotiations replacing violence and outside interference must be given a chance to prevail. This is a fundamental demand because the people of Central America have bled for too long.

Consider the case of Nicaragua, whose people have suffered so much during this century from military invasion of their country, through the many years of the brutal and corrupt Somoza dynasty, to this day of CIA-backed and trained counter-revolutionaries and mercenaries.

What crime have they the Nicaraguans committed? The only crime that they are guilty of is the same committed by the American colonies in their war of independence: the struggle for justice and self-determination.

We join with most of humanity in demanding that the people of Nicaragua be given a chance to build their country and their future in peace along the path that they choose.

As regards El Salvador, let me once again state boldly our support for the French/Mexican Declaration of 1981 which is aimed at bringing together the different representative forces of El Salvador for dialogue.

The failure of the United States administration to support these initiatives, which are the only realistic options for peace and social security in Central America, is really unfortunate and regrettable, and it brings to the surface once again the image of this Administration as being insensitive to the just aspirations of the peoples of the Third World.

At home in Grenada our people have a similar perception of the United States administration. This has come about as a result of the strained relations that have existed between our two Governments, since our March 13th Revolution.

Our people have never failed to contrast the poor state of relations between the United States and Grenada today with the embrace that the brutal, and corrupt dictator Eric Gairy received from successive US governments before the Revolution.

Up till very recently, our requests for dialogue have been met consistently with economic, political, diplomatic and military pressures on our young Revolution.

From the first days of coming to power, the United States pursued a policy which showed no respect for our national pride and aspiration, and sought constantly to bring the Revolution to its knees.

Many of our efforts to build a new economy have been undermined by the United States in multilateral institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, and as you know, bilateral assistance has not been forthcoming.

In 1981, our regional institution, the Caribbean Development Bank, was offered \$4 million for basic human needs projects, on condition that Grenada be entirely excluded. Another example of this policy is to be found in the US sponsored CBI, which excludes Grenada from being a participant, for purely political reasons.

We have faced tremendous adverse propaganda, especially against our new international airport project. We faced military pressure in August 1981 from a naval exercise 'Operation Amber and the Amberines' designed to intimidate Grenada. They have not agreed to our request for an exchange of Ambassadors; and even letters which I wrote to President Reagan in 1981 - proposing normalisation of relations and early high-level talks - have not been responded to.

These actions by the United States administration over the last four years constitute definite unfriendliness towards our young Revolution and young nation.

On reflection and analysis, we conclude that such an attitude exists principally because Grenada has taken a very decisive and firm step on the road to genuine national independence, non-alignment and self-determination. This is certain.

It is also certain that nations and peoples everywhere, with international legal and public opinion on their side, are more and more taking their own destinies in their hands, and fashioning their own realities.

The 1776 American Revolution was history-making testimony to this fact. The sovereignty of a people is non-negotiable, and for us in Grenada, inheritors of a deep sense of pride and independence - not an iota of our rights is negotiable.

It is also apparent, that Grenada is perceived as part of Washington's geopolitical designs. The numerous private and public assurances given by my government that we constitute no threat to the national security interest of the United States of America, or for that matter, of anyone else, should have been adequate long ago.

However, once again in your presence here tonight, we repeat these assurances and reemphasize our efforts towards secure, friendly and mutually respectful relations with all our neighbours, including the United States of America.

A third issue has been national elections. The new Grenada, like your country, was born in a great revolutionary act of liberation. The American Revolution gave itself a period of 13 years to consolidate before holding the first elections.

In South Africa there is no electoral process for Blacks, who are the majority of the population. Why isn't the United States administration withholding its massive support for South Africa until democracy is instituted for the millions of disenfranchised Blacks there?

And let us recall that despite the fact that the government of President Salvador Allende of Chile, was duly elected and instituted by the approved parliamentary processes, yet none of this deterred a previous US Administration from violently overthrowing this regime and liquidating its leadership and thousands of its people.

Sisters and brothers, friends, despite all of these clear inconsistencies, these painful and damaging actions against Grenada, this clear pattern of unfriendliness, we remain fervently committed to the normalisation and improvement of relations with your government, for this is in the best interests of our two peoples.

In these very days we are engaged in an earnest search for meaningful dialogue at appropriate levels and as far as Grenada is concerned we are willing to go into talks with an open mind and without preconditions. For us the true bottom line is - let us talk now.

Domestic developments in Grenada are satisfying. Many achievements are being recorded and temporary dislocations are being resolved.

The most significant achievement in four years of revolutionary transformation is the development of institutions of popular participatory democracy through which the legacy of backwardness and underdevelopment is being wiped out in Grenada, and real material benefits are coming to our people.

Over the past four years unemployment has been dramatically reduced. In fact, unemployment has been reduced from 49% to 12% and we have introduced free health care and free education for all of our people.

Our form of democracy in Grenada has already achieved four main aspects to date. These are: participation, accountability, responsibility and material benefits.

A fifth and final component of our new democracy, electability, is already being experienced by our people through their mass organisations where fair and open elections are held on a regular basis and in due course this process will also be extended to the national level.

But sisters and brothers, among our proudest achievements is the development of institutions of popular democracy. Participation in trade unions and other mass organisations has grown by leaps and bounds. New organisations of women, farmers, youth and workers have been formed and existing ones have grown stronger.

A system of monthly Parish and Zonal Councils, open to all citizens, ensures free, regular discussion of issues, permanent contact between government and people and strict accountability and responsibility of the leadership of the government and party.

Of course, the Revolution like all previous revolutions has brought disrupting and temporary dislocations in Grenada. A small number of persons have had to be detained, some press freedoms have been limited and elections have not yet been held. Our government understands the difficulties these situations pose.

However, it is important to repeat that all revolutions involve temporary dislocations and, for a period, it is always necessary to restrain the abuses and excesses of a violent or disruptive minority in the interests of consolidating the revolution and bringing concrete benefits to the long-suffering and formerly oppressed majority.

The People's Revolutionary Government and the people of Grenada have regarded development of the economy, improvement of the standard of living, expansion of education and employment, development of the popular organisations and the improvement of the country's defences as matters having priority over constitutional reform.

The time has come, however, to take the process of the formal institutionalisation of the Revolution a stage further and commence work on the preparation of a new constitution. We take this opportunity to announce tonight that a Commission was today appointed in Grenada and charged with the task of formulating a meaningful democratic and workable constitution for our country.

The Commission comprises: Allan Alexander, State Counsel and former High Court judge, a distinguished Trinidadian lawyer of great experience and prestige; Richard Hart, outstanding historian and lawyer, and the present Attorney General of Grenada; Ashley Taylor, an outstanding Grenadian lawyer.

In addition to these three eminent jurists, one representative to be selected by the Grenada Trades Union Council, the umbrella organisation for all Labour Unions in our country, and one other representative of the other mass organisations of farmers, women and youth in our country.

In this way, the views of all classes, strata and sections in our country will be represented on the Constitution Commission. Taking into account the views of our people, including all minority views, the Commission has been mandated to formulate within a period of 24 months, a constitution relevant to the needs of our vibrantly developing society.

After the findings of the Constitutional Commission have been submitted to our government, the Draft Constitution will then be discussed in detail by the people of our country.

These discussions will result in a second draft which will include the ideas of the people and when a referendum is held and all due process completed a new people's constitution - the first in our history - would have come into existence.

This new constitution will define all dimensions of our electoral process and in particular will institutionalise the systems of popular democracy which have been introduced by our government and which have given such depth and meaning to the term participatory democracy. Because of the momentous nature of tonight's announcement, I want to crave [sic] your indulgence to read the terms of reference of the Commission:

- To obtain information on alternative forms of political constitutions and the ways in which political constitutions work in practice in other countries.
- To receive and consider written and oral representations as to matters which should be provided for, and the form and structure of a constitution for Grenada.
- To receive and consider the views and proposals of all classes, strata and interests of the Grenadian people.
- To prepare for public consideration and discussion a draft constitution and participate in public and other discussions thereon.
- To consider and assess written and oral proposals for improvement or alteration of the Draft Constitution received from organisations, groups or individuals.
- To prepare for the Government, with such notes and other supplementary material as may be appropriate, a final draft constitution for approval by the people of Grenada in a referendum.

As we strive to bring social and economic benefits to the people of our country, we look forward now to an event of tremendous significance to our economy, to our people, to our future development - the opening of the new international airport.

Those of you who have visited our country know just how important this project is to both our peoples. And those of you who have not done so, will soon have the chance - as I now invite you to join with hundreds of others who will be on the inaugural flight from Washington to Grenada on the day the airport opens - March 13th, 1984. Certainly if you can make it this will give you an opportunity to travel to the most widely publicised International Airport the world has ever known. Let us thank those responsible for all the free publicity.

We certainly look forward to welcoming on that inaugural flight as many of you as possible. We will welcome you with the greatest pleasure and look forward to your sharing with us the tremendous joy of that important event.

Sisters and brothers, the unity and solidarity of our people is of great importance. We see it as our duty to support every initiative for the unification of the peoples of the Caribbean who are not only part of the same geographical formation, but who share a basically common history and culture - the history of slavery and colonialism, the culture which we have forged from the legacy of Africa.

As we take initiatives aimed at finding solutions to the problems of small island states; as we focus upon the need to find more efficient and less costly transportation services between the islands of the Caribbean region; as we repeatedly issue the call for the Caribbean region to be declared and recognised in practice as a Zone of Peace, Independence and development; as we host conferences of labour leaders, journalists and intellectuals who discuss the problems of the region; we are guided always by the vision of the Caribbean as one people, aiming together at genuine peace, independence and development.

Brothers and sisters, the economic achievement of the poor and dispossessed peoples of the world is a matter of great concern to us. We cannot support a system in which transnational corporations, interested only in profit, bolster racist regimes like that of South Africa, and contribute to the suffering and hardship of millions of our brothers and sisters.

The existing international economic order makes a mockery of dreams of development for our struggling peoples. We must support the establishment of a New International Economic Order, aimed at the ownership and control by developing countries of their economic resources and at a system of international trade based on just prices for our exports.

The 1982 agreement on the Law of the Sea is an important achievement and should be recognised as such by all countries sensitive to the problems of underdevelopment, since it seeks to ensure for developing countries a just share of the resources of the sea.

Grenada continues to give support to the North/South dialogue and the need for the resumption of the global negotiations convinced that the world's industrialised countries have a responsibility to assist with the establishment of a just and equitable international economic order which is objectively in their interest as well as in the interest of the developing world. But no new international economic order is possible, no development can take place in any area of the world without the necessary social infrastructure of world peace.

By far the most important struggle in the world today is the struggle for peace.

The very existence of humanity is threatened by the insane drive to stockpile weapons of mass destruction. Think of the tremendous waste of one country's spending US 83 trillion on arms over the next five years. And this, when there are so many people jobless, when there are so many starving, illiterate, unemployed people all over the world.

Statistics show that the cost of one modern tank could pay for the construction of 1,000 classrooms for 30,000 children in developing countries: that the price of a Trident nuclear submarine equals the cost of keeping 16 million children from underdeveloped countries in school for a year plus the cost of constructing 400 large living complexes to house two million persons.

These startling figures certainly give added impetus to the ever-strengthening call of the world's peoples for peace in this hemisphere, and make even more sadly ironic the hunger and deprivation of so many millions of people the world over. Grenada calls for an end to the arms race, for serious negotiations aimed at strategic arms limitation, for a move towards genuine disarmament. Increasingly, the people of the world are realising the need to speak out against warlike and confrontationist policies, to insist that there be dialogue aimed at establishing a lasting peace.

Together we must insist that the policies on Southern Africa, on Central America, on the Middle East, and on the Caribbean, be aimed at ensuring peace, justice and progress for the peoples of these regions.

Sisters and brothers, we call upon you, as an important foreign affairs lobby of the United States, to continue to analyse the actions of your country in the world today.

If the world is to be at peace, if the suffering and deprived peoples of the world are to attain some programme of progress and justice, the United States must, as a world power, pursue policies which show a clear understanding and appreciation of the problems of developing countries. Sisters and brothers, friends, your country must approach these problems, not with arrogance and condescension, but with sensitivity and empathy.

This would augur well for world peace and would lead to better relations among all the nations of the world. The April 1983 Report of the Linowitz Commission on the Inter-American Dialogue shows a great deal of recognition of this need for understanding, co-operation and dialogue.

The peoples of our region, and the peoples of the United States cry out with one voice for peace, for sanity, for justice, for dignity.

Bearing in mind the importance of dialogue and understanding to the proper conduct of international relations and the tremendous importance of peace to our dreams of development and progress, we once again reiterate our genuine interest in establishing normal bilateral relations with the United States administration; we remain open to honest and genuine proposals for dialogue at appropriate levels. We must show, in our mutual approach to the Resolution of our difficulties a spirit of inter-American equality and respect.

Grenada cherishes the vision of a new Caribbean civilisation, free from oppression and exploitation, where the conditions will exist for every man, woman and child to exercise to the fullest their human potential.

Finally, sisters and brothers, friends, we proudly share with you the noble dreams of Martin and Malcolm for an America free of racism and discrimination; for a world free of hunger, poverty and strife; for a future free of want and despair.

With sincerity and humility, we thank you for your kind invitation to be here at this time, for your past, present and future support, and for the warmth and hospitality you have unhesitatingly showered on me and my delegation.

We invite you, to soon visit our friendly country so that we may reciprocate your gracious cordiality and show you the revolutionary achievements of our people.

Long live friendship between the peoples of the United States and Grenada

Long live peace in our Americas and in the world

Together we shall overcome

Forward ever, backward never

Source: <http://www.thegrenadarevolutiononline.com/bishtransafrica.html>
[accessed May 19, 2017].



People gathered at the New Jewel Movement national secretariat in Grenada

Photo Source: Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries,
University of New Mexico