

OPENING REMARKS OF COMMISSIONER RUGGLES FERGUSON AT THE LAUNCH OF  
NTRC'S 10TH ANNIVERSARY ACTIVITIES AND THE OFFICAL LAUNCH OF THE  
UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUND

FLAMBOYANT HOTEL, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29TH, 2010

The year **2000** marked an historic turning point in the telecommunications industry in the Eastern Caribbean - moving from monopoly control to the ushering in of a liberalized and competitive environment. Grenada was an integral part of that historic process and indeed was the birthplace of the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Treaty signed here on May 4th, 2000. Five states – being the Commonwealth of Dominica, the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines and Grenada – became part of the ECTEL family and remain so up to this day.

Thanks to the ECTEL Treaty and the Telecommunications Act (No. 31 of 2000) the National Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (NTRC) was born, in September 2000. The mandate given to the NTRC by the treaty and the local Act was clear: regulate the new liberalized telecommunications market in Grenada; ensure fair practices by telecoms providers; and promote and maintain high quality Telecoms services at fair and competitive prices to consumers.

### **Universal Services Fund**

The founding States recognized that even in an open and competitive market there will be some areas where the delivery of telecommunications services will not be financially viable. Without proper mechanisms in place, such areas will remain un-served and under-served, being unprofitable to the providers. That's why the 2000 vision embraced the establishment of a Universal Service Fund to ensure service to the un-served and under-served – to ensure that telecommunications services were accessible and affordable to rural areas, schools, hospitals and other entities serving the public needs.

Firmly embedded in the 2000 Telecommunications Act (Section 43) is provision therefore for the establishment of a Universal Service Fund to ensure widespread access and availability of telecommunication services on an equitable basis to all users. These services include both telephone and internet access. As mandated by the law, the Universal Services Fund comprises contributions by the telecommunication providers operating in the market, funds directly appropriated by parliament and donations from individuals or private companies.

Today, in keeping with the original mission and vision of the founding states, and in accordance with the legal mandate, we proudly launch the Universal Service Fund. Coinciding with the 10th anniversary launch makes the occasion even more memorable and serves as a solid platform to begin the second 10-year milestone of the NTRC.

### **Regulating the market**

Regulating the liberalized telecommunications market and promoting healthy competition involve a range of activities: issuing licenses; collecting fees; facilitating and monitoring interconnection agreements between providers; protecting consumers, through Price Cap Plans, against arbitrary price increases by service providers; managing the radio spectrum; managing the .GD domain name, promoting number portability; and addressing complaints of interference with or interception of licensed networks.

Over the last 10 years the NTRC has been fulfilling its mandate, meeting consistently on a monthly basis, coordinating closely with ECTEL, holding regular consultations with providers and other operators in the market, focusing on training and more training for both Commissioners and the technical and administrative staff, and engaging in healthy dispute resolution.

Today we can justifiably boast of a highly motivated, energized and professionalized staff and a Commission dedicated to fulfilling and further developing the original mandate.

## **Dedicated Commissioners**

Special mention must be made of two commissioners – our seasoned and highly qualified Chairman *Dr. Linus Spencer Thomas* and *Commissioner George Lashley*. Both were appointed to the first NTRC and have given 10 years of unbroken, dedicated and invaluable service to the Commission. They remain Commissioners up to today, unfazed by the passage of time. Commissioner Lashley, who carries a wealth of experience in the telecommunications industry, continues to display youthful energy despite at an age that can easily qualify as advanced retirement.

I am reliably informed that Commissioner Lashley never missed a meeting of the Commission in 10 years, save for one occasion this month when he was unavoidably absent due to the dreaded 'Tornado' (flu). Dr. Spencer Thomas, whose skills and experience are always in high demand in different parts of the globe, has provided excellent and professional leadership to the commission over the last 10 years. He is regrettably absent today, with national duties demanding his presence elsewhere.

We can also boast of a healthy and professional relationship with ECTEL, the Ministry and Minister responsible for Telecommunications, the Telecommunications Providers, Broadcasters, Amateur Radio Operators and other stakeholders in the industry – a relationship we intend to continue to deepen and strengthen.

## **Highlights of 10th anniversary**

Today we speak not only about Telecommunications but also of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) – a converged environment encompassing various forms of electronic communications.

Highlights of the 10th Anniversary activities include a *Youth Forum* on ICT, which is intended to sensitize our youth and students to the wonders of technology and to the *do's and don'ts* of the internet in particular; a *Symposium* with Telecoms Providers,

Broadcasters and other stakeholders to share ideas on material issues as we chart the way forward; and an *awards ceremony* to recognize those who have contributed to our achievements and continuous growth over the last ten years.

### **New legislation & public awareness**

The NTRC shall also be heightening its public awareness drive in the coming period. With the rapid and phenomenal growth of the ICT sector, existing laws require amendment and new laws are to be introduced. We need to keep our laws abreast of rapidly unfolding technology.

We shall soon begin public sensitization on the proposed *Electronics Communications Bill* intended to wholly replace the existing Telecommunications Act of 2000; and on the proposed harmonized legislation being promoted by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and the Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU).

The proposed harmonized legislation covers *Cybercrime, Privacy & Data Protection, Freedom of Information, Interception of Communications, Electronic Transactions and Electronic Evidence*.- six (6) distinct pieces of legislation aimed collectively at reducing internet crime; enhancing internet security while preserving individual rights; making Government/official information and documentation more readily accessible; and promoting speedy and efficient business activity via the internet.

### **Moving forward**

We wish to thank all those who have contributed to the success of the first 10 years. Let us embrace the strengths, learn from the shortcomings and move forward together as we strive to promote universal service and to facilitate a fair, equitable, productive, and healthy competitive environment for the benefit of the people of the region. I thank you.