

# **Prime Minister's Address on the occasion of the NTRC 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and its Recognition and Awards Ceremony**

**"Recognizing and celebrating achievements – 10 Years of Continuous Growth in the ICT Sector".**

**Prime Minister Tillman Thomas**

**Friday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2011**

Salutations

It gives me great pleasure to join you this evening as we recognize and celebrate outstanding achievements in the ICT sector over the last ten years. This celebration coincides with the tenth anniversary of the NTRC, an organization whose formation signaled in a tangible way the liberalization of the telecommunications sector.

During the past year, you have engaged in many successful activities designed to highlight the success and milestones achieved and to profile the sector. Today we have assembled primarily to reward the outstanding contributors whose commitment, dedication and hard work have built the organization. Ultimately, their work have contributed to the array of services and competitive prices now enjoyed by thousands of consumers through the ECTEL region.

When the OECS heads made the deliberate decision to pursue the liberalization of the sector over ten years ago, there was much apprehension. Stakeholder response was mixed as we were about to chart new waters. The issues were complex and unfamiliar. However, their resolve and conviction of the regional leaders to pursue the goal of liberalization was unquestionable.

Today we enjoy the fruits of their vision and their labour.

Today we all will agree that our societies currently enjoy greater access, competitive products and services and better prices.

Today, the telecommunications sector consists of three major players offering services.

- (i) Cable & Wireless/LIME: Offering *fixed, mobile and Internet services*
- (ii) Digicel: Offering *mobile services*
- (iii) Columbus Communication/FLOW: *Offering Fixed and Internet services*

I further understand that a new entrant Aislecom, will be offering *Mobile and voice resale services* bringing the number of providers to four.

During the last decade, they has been key milestones and achievements which are worthy of mention. They include:

- The signing of ECTEL Treaty (2000)
- The enactment of Telecommunications Act (2000)
- The formation of the NTRC Commission (2000)
- The establishment of the NTRC Secretariat (2001)
- The Agreement termination monopoly rights signed (2001)
- The Promulgation of Regulations (2001-2009)
- The Granting of Telecommunications Licences to Telecommunications Providers to allow for competition in the sector
- The Signing of Interconnection Agreements
- The implementation of Price Cap Plan to regulate the fixed line service
- The Launching and expansion of cellular service (2003 to 2009)
- The landing and Commissioning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Submarine Landing Cable System, creating alternate connectivity to the international gateway
- The Launching of Universal Service Fund (2010)

Ladies and gentlemen in terms of observable trends, it is instructive to note that mobile penetration now stands at 110% compared to approximately 8% at the onset of liberalization. This also compares favourably with the world penetration rate of 68%.

At the same time fixed line penetration declined from 29% to 26% during the same period. This also compares favourably with the world rate of 18%. Internet penetration increased from 4% to 11.6% with the world rate at 7.5%. This segment you would note lags significantly behind the other services and is directly related to the costs and availability of computers and broadband services. This we need to address expeditiously.

As we look forward to another decade, we should be ever mindful of the objectives of the NTRC to ensure fair competitive practices by telecommunications providers and to promote and maintain high quality telecommunications services at fair and competitive prices for consumers.

As we continue our liberalization and regulatory journey, we will have to address the many evolving issues that characterize the ICT landscape. These include climate change, internet governance, e-commerce, bridging the digital divide, continuing convergence, cyber security, the development of broadband infrastructure, internet development and access, human resource development, the new ICT legislation and many more. Just as we have successfully addressed the many issues of the past, I am confident that will adequately continue to respond to the many challenges.

So as we celebrate today, I join with you to recognise and honour persons all who have contributed to the successes in the telecommunications sector.

- ✓ These include all the former and current Telecommunications Ministers, Chairmen and Commissioners of the OECS for their strong leadership in spearheading the liberalization process.
- ✓ All the technical and supporting staff for their commitment and hard work
- ✓ ECTEL for their leadership
- ✓ And the Telecommunications Providers for their continuous and significant infrastructure investment in the economy.