



**Remarks by
Dr. the Right Honourable Keith Mitchell
Prime Minister of Grenada
Launch of Eastern Caribbean Solar Challenge
May 20, 2021**

It is indeed an honour to speak today on this momentous occasion which marks the start of a significant journey for OECS member states. I must commend the OECS Commission for the foresight in conceiving the Eastern Caribbean Solar Challenge, an initiative which seeks to increase the awareness and deployment of renewable energy technologies.

This initiative takes on added significance because of the Caribbean's vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change. We must, as a matter of priority, escalate the process of building resilience into our development strategies. The uniqueness of this particular era of development, marked significantly by the COVID-19 pandemic, further underscores the urgent need for resilience.

The Caribbean people are already well-endowed with the spirit of resilience, given our innate ability to survive and thrive, even in adversity. We now need to entrench that resilience into the development process, to hopefully reduce the impact of future external shocks.

When faced with challenges like we are now with the ongoing pandemic, we need to resort to innovation and ingenuity, to leapfrog through the hurdles, and continue to forge ahead with development.

Even before the pandemic added a layer of complexity to our development challenges, the unprecedented warming of the global climate posed a direct threat to the region. Addressing this existential threat requires reduced dependence on fossil fuels and the elimination of climate forcers.

The power generation sector is heavily reliant on fossil fuels, therefore any serious attempt at reducing carbon emissions must include initiatives in that sector. We have already created several international frameworks that seek to address the level of carbon emissions, so we must now drive the implementation process.

Many nations, including Grenada, have been taking bold and ambitious steps forward in announcing mitigation, adaptation and finance targets. In December 2020, Grenada became the first OECS country to submit its Second Nationally Determined Contribution (or NDC) as required under the historic Paris climate agreement.

Grenada has committed to an ambitious 40% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, based on 2010 emission levels. Further, we have committed to the ambitious target of 30% electricity generation by renewable energy sources by 2030. Achieving this target means that Grenada needs at least 10 megawatts of solar power to come online between now and 2030.

It will be remiss of me not to mention the bold decision taken by the Grenada Government to reform the electricity sector with the repurchase of the utility company. The move, though very costly, will enable investment in renewable energy technology as a key element for economic growth and development.

It is clear to us that the Government must play a decisive role in determining the energy mix and development profile of the country. And as a critical partner, the utility company must be prepared to periodically adjust its business model to be consistent with the trajectory of 100% power generation from renewable energy sources by 2050.

The science is rapidly evolving and solar innovation and technology are quickly advancing with significant reductions in costs and similarly substantial increases in capacity and applications. Our interconnected economies and supply chains are ripe with opportunities for nature-based solutions like solar applications that are consistent with low carbon development.

The Eastern Caribbean Solar Challenge is therefore the greatest opportunity for us in the region, to contribute to addressing the climate change problem, to ensure that global average temperatures remain below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

In my view, the initiative is quite timely. It is deliberately simple in design, but far-reaching in its potential to impact the social and economic fabric of our society. This home-grown, region-driven initiative seeks the participation of everyone - Governments, the private sector, development partners and households across the OECS.

The solar challenge is premised on the reality that the energy future of the Eastern Caribbean must be constructed on a solid bedrock of indigenous renewable energy that is not subject to the vagaries of the global energy market. It recognises that solar electricity, which was once considered an expensive novelty, is now accepted as a mature and cost-competitive technology.

The recovery effort that will become necessary in a post COVID-19 environment, presents an opportunity for the world to take a greener approach to development. As such, renewables must be the energy source to power this recovery and to lay the foundation for the resilient development of the sub-region.

The Eastern Caribbean Solar Challenge, therefore holds the potential to combine all regional efforts to this end and to unite our countries in a "Race to the Sun", a race in which we can all emerge victorious. The solar challenge also provides a platform for the creation of green jobs that will prove particularly attractive to the young men and women of the region.

There is a general perception that climate and energy security are primarily the domain of government. But governments cannot do this alone. We need the support and participation of our external partners, and the full engagement of the business community, the financial sector, civil society and private citizens. Electric utility companies across the region, which have long shouldered the responsibility for powering our societies and economies, must fully embrace the exciting new energy future that awaits. We all have a part to play in greening our respective economies.

Sisters and brothers, today's launch represents a catalyst for future opportunities for expansion to include other renewable energy technologies, energy efficiency, electric vehicles and so much more. I urge us all to share, embrace and work collectively towards this vision.

I commend the governments of the region for their efforts, thus far, to facilitate the diffusion of renewable energy. It is incumbent on us all, to support the solar challenge, by instituting the appropriate policy, legislative and fiscal measures and continuing our efforts to green the public sector with solar power.

I must also commend our development partners who have committed to supporting the Eastern Caribbean Solar Challenge. I also take this opportunity to invite those planning to do so, to come fully on board. I assure you that nowhere else will you find a renewable energy initiative that is so inclusive and unites so many countries. In global terms, the support that we seek is miniscule, like our emissions, but the results thereof, will reverberate well beyond this region.

Sisters and brothers, as we embark on this challenge today, to realise a greener region, powered by the sun, I invite one and all to take up the challenge. I commit to fully playing my part in realising the success of this initiative.

In closing, I suggest that the OECS Commission encourages and enables our talented youth to get more involved in the fields of science, technology and innovation, as they prepare to make their mark as future leaders.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the importance of the digital economy and electronic communications. What once seemed impossible, is now the reality. We must therefore "prepare the wicket" for innovation geared towards enhancing the participation of our youth and budding entrepreneurs in the solar opportunity and the regional economic recovery plan.

My final charge to the OECS Commission is to continue to keep the fingers on the pulse of regional development and we will surely reach the sun.

I thank you.