1983 \_ Grenada \_ Maurice Bishop, Hunter College Speech

**SPEAKERS**

Maurice Bishop

00:00

01:07

Thank you very much for that very warm welcome, sisters and brother, comrades, all. May start off sisters and brothers by bringing to you warm fraternal greetings from the free people of revolutionary Grenada.

01:25

And may I also right at this very beginning, say how very, very pleasant it is to be back in New York among you to be in this great hall, where there are so many hundreds of our sisters and brothers. That is going to bring a great deal of pleasure to our free people and I will sit and report your warmth, your enthusiasm and your revolutionary support for our process when I return.

02:18

Of course we are here among friends but looking around, there are two people here who are right now representing their country at the United Nations, people who are involved in liberation struggles, people who are struggling for their national liberation, for justice for freedom for the countries, freedom for their peoples. It is very important right at the beginning sisters and brothers, that we acknowledge the presence of Dr. [unkown], the representative to the United Nation of the People's Liberation Organization PLO.

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Dr [unknown] can be assured, as always, that the people of Palestine and their sole authentic representatives, the Palestinian Liberation Organization will always have the full support of the fraternal people of Grenada.

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The South African and racists who have spent so much time inventing all sorts of ingenious ways of oppressing the people of South Africa, the black majority, who have spent so much time in ensuring that those people are not able to reclaim their true patrimony. They are now discovering that in common with all of the national liberation movements around the world that are forced to move to the highest stage of the struggle that the African National Congress is also willing to make that step.

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In saluting the Deputy Permanent Representative of the ANC to the United Nations, let us ask him, to bring back to his people, to bring back to his organization, to bring back to Oliver Tambo, to bring back to Nelson Mandela, whoes Spirit is here with us.

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To bring back to all of his people, and to his revolutionary organization, the love, the respect, the concern, the admiration, and the fraternal feelings of all of us to the people of South Africa.

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The last time I had the opportunity sisters and brothers, comrades of being in New York, and addressing our Grenadian nationals, other people from the Caribbean and Latin America, and, of course, the people of the United States in New York was four years ago. As our ambassador to the United Nations has said, since those four years have passed, a lot has happened in our country. A lot has happened in the world. And one of the reasons at this time that we have come to the United States, in fact, is to be able to share our experiences of the last four years with the people of the United States. We were anxious to do this because of course, there has been a major campaign over the last several weeks and months, starting from last year, November, with some remarks by the Vice President in Miami, continuing with more remarks from the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Admiral of the Fleet, and then the President himself. And in all of these remarks and allegations, different allegations were made against our country. And therefore we were particularly happy comrades to have had the opportunity of an invitation from TransAfrica, the organization based in Washington, that has been doing a lot of lobbying for Africa and the Caribbean, we were invited to come to address their sixth annual dinner last night. And that was a very successful event. And we want to publicly thank TransAfrica once again, for making this visit possible.

08:14

The Congressional Black Caucus too was involved as co-sponsors of this visit, and we also want to place of appreciation on the record. Of course, we set ourselves other objectives once the visit was definitely confirmed. And these objectives included the very important objective of trying to see what we could do to deepen and strengthen the people to people relations, which have always existed between our two countries, Grenada and the United States. At the level of the people, there has never been any problem. At the level of the people, we have always had excellent relations with the people of the United States. In fact, as you know, in some years more American tourists come to our country than the entire population of the country. And on top of that, there is a medical school in Grenada and at this medical school, over 700 Young Americans are earning the right to become doctors, are getting a career in free Grenada.

09:48

So from our point of view, clearly, bad relations do not make sense. From our point of view, the need to deepen ties, the need to ensure that even more American visitors come to our country every year is a critical and burning need. And another objective was to try yet again, to establish some form of official contact, an official dialogue with the Government of the United States. We of course, cannot decide which government is going to be in power in the United States, at any given moment in time, that is a matter for the people of the United States. And whoever happens to be in power, the particular thing, we believe it is extremely important for us to maintain normal relations, so that we are able to conduct proper dialogue in a civilized fashion.

11:04

There is a need for some kind of mechanism to be established. And that is why we have been struggling so hard over all of these years to try to get some of the basic norms reestablished. Let us exchange ambassadors we have said, they have rejected that. So, we have no Ambassador accredited to Washington because they refuse to accept the credentials of the ambassador we have suggested. When they replaced their ambassador, after the electoral victory of President Reagan in 1980 and a new ambassador came out in 1981, he was not in fact accredited to Grenada. So we have to talk presumably using loudspeakers. And even when we write letters, like I did, for example, in 1981, on two occasions to President Reagan in March, and again in August 1 letter short letter making the simple obvious point, look, you are a new president. We had hoped that as a new president, you would have taken a new look at the situation, that you would have been anxious to start off on as good relations as you can, with all countries around the world. We had hoped that you therefore, would have wanted relations normalized. And we went on in that letter to make the point that what we are saying is the true bottom line is dialogue, it is talks. Therefore, let us get these talks going. We are proposing no agenda with any preconditions. Let us look at all questions, let us put them all on the table. Let us see what you perceive as problems, we will tell you what we perceive as problems. Let us see if in the course of those discussions, we can narrow down differences so at least the new beginning that is made really begun on a basis of mutual understanding with less distrust, and less suspicion - no reply to that letter. So the fact is sisters and brothers we have had this long, long history of trying to see in what ways relations could be normalized, of working very hard at trying to get some form of dialogue going. And we have had very little success in this regard. But I really want to say tonight, that we do believe it is important for us to continue that struggle and therefore, notwithstanding the difficulties in the way we deem it very advisable for us to continue to press for a full normalization of relations. But of course, as we press for normalization, we are also going to continue to build our revolution. We are also going to continue to consolidate our process in the face of all of the difficulties in the face of all of the economic destabilization, the political, diplomatic and military threats and pressure. We don't intend to roll over and play like an ostrich. We are going to stand on our feet and keep going forward.

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And as you know as sisters and brothers in these times, it is becoming more and more difficult for developing Third World countries to go forward. Because unfortunately, our economies remain by and large, dependent on and tied to the capitalist world economies. And therefore, when the capitalist world goes through their cyclical crises, one after the other, it has an immediate effect on us. As we say at home, when the capitalist world catches a cold, we catch pneumonia. And the crisis in the capitalist world has been deep. In all of the developed industrialized countries, there is greater and greater unemployment. And as this unemployment goes deeper and deeper into the society, the people who feel it the most are the poor and working people, the massive cutbacks.

16:09

The massive cuts in social welfare, the cuts are not coming in the arms race. The cuts are not coming out of the arms budget. I understand the talk is to spend $3 trillion dollars over five years, the mind boggles. That is the kind of money that is supposed to be consumed in arms. But while that kind of money is being consumed in arms, hospitals are closing down. Jobs are being, more and more retrenchment is taking place. Pensions are being reduced, Medicaid is being reduced. In other words, the arms is swallowing up the money. The people are not benefiting. But the effect this has had on us in turn, countries of the developing world has been to also create a crisis in the developing world. In the developing world as a whole, it is now estimated that our debts exceed $650 billion. That is how much money we owe collectively. Just servicing of debts alone is causing massive problems for the countries of the Third World. Last year, $131 billion was spent on the countries of the Third World in just servicing their debt, just paying the interest not one cent back on the capital. And that took $121 billion. But on top of that, we are also discovering that it is becoming more and more difficult to engage in trade with the countries of the western industrialized world. But even as they make it more difficult for us to trade with them the whole question of aid, which at one time used to be regarded as a kind of duty that developed capitalist world developed industrialized who would had. If duty it was, that duty has virtually disappeared because the reality is that aid has also decreased quite dramatically for Third World countries. But not satisfied with all of that, what they have now done after cutting off aid, cutting off trade, cutting off investment, making it virtually impossible to get money through the international financial institutions, now they are forcing more and more Third World countries to go directly to the international capital market, to the big commercial banks to get loans. But the reality is that by forcing us more and more, to have to go to the international capital market, the debt trap is intensified even more. And while all of this is going on sisters and brothers, there are so many people in the world who are unemployed, so many people in the world who are going hungry, to bed hungry every single night. So many millions in the Third World who are illiterate, and whose governments either do not care or feel they cannot do anything to solve that problem. Unemployment, hunger, malnutrition, disease, illiteracy. These are the crimes and sins that have visited upon the poor developing countries of a Third World, while industrialized countries continue to exploit our resources and to keep the profits

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but yet sisters and brothers, in the face of all of that the Grenada revolution has nonetheless continued to go forward and to make progress.

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At a time when even the big powerful industrialized nations were growing backwards last year, we grew forward by 5.5%.

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The revolution in Grenada, starting from a base from Gairy of 49% unemployment. Coming from that base, when we did a census last year, April 1982, the unemployment rate had dropped from 49% to down to 14.2%.

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Last year of Gairy 1978, the capital investment program was $8 million. The first year of the revolution, that figure was more than doubled, it went to $16 million. The second year of the revolution, it was doubled. Again, it went to $39.9 million and by this time, the experts were saying that is impossible. You don't have the resources, you don't have the management. You don't have enough tractors, you don't have enough trucks, you don't have enough engineers, you can't possibly do it. You all were only lucky in 1979, when you doubled Gairy own and you're only lucky 1980 again when you double your own. And then when he went in 1981, we doubled it again. They say well, we don't know of it's luck but something is wrong, y'all can do that again. And then last year in 1982, it went up to over 100 million, and then we gave them the secret. We told them that in a revolution, things operate differently in a normal situation.

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We have been able to make these accomplishments because in Grenada, consistent with our three pillars of the revolution, where the first pillar of the revolution is our people who are always at the center and heart and focus of all of our activities. We are able to mobilize and organize the people to cut out waste, to cut out corruption, to stamp on inefficiency, to move to planning, to look out for production to check on productivity, to make sure that state enterprises are not set up to be subsidized, but state enterprises too must become viable must make a profit and therefore the state sector will then have the surplus to bring the benefits. We have been able to pull our people into the whole economic process. I know people have gladly been pulled into the economic process, because our people see the benefits, which the revolution has brought to them. They understand that when 37 cents out of every dollar is spent on health and education. That means something. In this country the figure is probably nearer to 10 cents on every dollar. Because today in Grenada, the money that the people of Grenada used to have to spend for example, when they went to a doctor or a dentist, that money they no longer have to spend because they now have free health care throughout the system.

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Our people understand the value and the benefit of free secondary education. Because they know now that once their children are able to pass the common entrance exam and get into secondary school, they no longer have to worry about finding those fees, which as you know, for agricultural workers, for example, are very often impossible. But not just free secondary education, but in effect free university education.

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Moving from a situation before the revolution, where in the last year of Gairy 1978, just three people went abroad on university scholarships, and they happen to be Gairy's daughter, and one is another minister's daughter. Moving from that situation and the first six months of the revolution 109 students were able to go abroad on pre University scholarships.

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Our people are more and more getting to understand what we mean when we say that education to us is liberation.

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That education is a strategic concern of this government. That is why the this year 1982 is the year we have named the year of political and academic education because we understand the importance of bringing education to our people. Following the establishment of the Centre for popular education programme in early 1980. Within one year of the work of the CPE programme, the illiteracy figure in Grenada was reduced to 2% of the entire population.

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The people understand that in areas in all areas of their basic needs, real attempts are being needed to solve these problems. Two and a half million gallons more of water, pipe borne water are flowing into the homes of or Grenadians this time. Before the revolution on the 30% of all homes, had potable water. It people understand what it means when electrification is brought to their village, if people understand what it means when they know that by the end, the middle of next year, we will have doubled the electricity output and capacity in our country, and therefore more people would have the possibility of electricity. Our people, therefore sisters and brothers, have a greater and deeper understanding of what the revolution means and what it has brought to them. They certainly understand very, very clearly that when some people attack us on the ground of human rights, when some people attack us on the ground of constituting a threat to the national security of other countries, our people understand that this is foolishness. They know the real reason has to do with the fact of the revolution and the benefits that a revolution are bringing to the people of our country.

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The real reason for all of this hostility is because some perceive that what is happening in Grenada can lead to a new socio economic and political path of development.

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They give all kinds of reasons and excuses some of them credible, some utter rubbish. There's an interesting one that we saw very recently in a secret report of the State Department. I want to tell you about that one. So you can reflect on that one. That secret report made this point that Grenada is different to Cuba and Nicaragua and the Grenada revolution is in one sense even worse, using their language, than the Cuban and Nicaragua Revolution's because the people of Grenada and the leadership of Grenada speaks English and therefore can communicate directly to the people of the United States.

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I can see from your applause sisters and brothers that you agree with the report. But I want to tell you what that same report also said, and said that also made us very dangerous. And that is, that the people of Grenada and the leadership of Grenada are predominantly black.

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They said that 95% of our population is black, and they had a correct statistic. And if we have 95% of predominantly African origin in our country, then we can have a dangerous appeal to 30-million black people in the United States.

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Now that aspect of the report clearly is one of the most sensible ones. But sisters and brothers, how do we evaluate other sides of the report? Like when they say that Grenada violates human rights? When they say to us, how come you have detainees? What about the press? What about elections? When they say to us, where are your elections? They don't turn around at the same time and say to their friends in South Africa, where are your elections?

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When they say to us that elections must be held and if you don't have elections, then you can't expect support. And unless you have elections, then we can't give you the normal treatments. We say, Salvador Allende of Chile. Salvador Allende of Chile was elected in September 1970. By the People of Chile. Allende did not take power through a revolution. Allende did not form a militia. Allende did not grab any land or property. Allende had no political detainees. Allende did not crush the press. He did not close down the parliament. He did not suspend the Constitution. He played by every rule they wrote but they killed him still.

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These people understand very wellthat a revolution means a new situation. Revolution means that the abuses and excesses of the violent reactionary and disruptive minority has to be crushed so that the majority interests can prevail.

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When the Americans had their revolution in 1776, it took them 13 years to call their elections.

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They talk about detainees but when the American Revolution came in 1776, 600,000 people were detained in this country. 100,000 Americans in the first week of the American Revolution, 100,000 fled to Canada. 1000's were locked up without charge or trial. Hundreds were shot. And the counter revolutionaries after the American Revolution, they had no rights to vote. They had no right to teach. They had no right to preach. They had no right to a job. Their land was confiscated without payments. So when the falsifiers of history, try to pretend that the American Revolution was a Boston Tea Party, it was a very bloody tea party.

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That's something that very often happens in all revolutions. The spontaneous upheaval of the masses did not really happen in Grenada. A church-based organisation in Washington called Epica wrote a book last year in Grenada, they called it Grenada, the peaceful revolution, we can understand why.

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So when these elements come and make these statements, we understand only too well, where they are coming from. They understand that in Grenada, no one is ever interfered with, for what he says, no one is ever interfered with, for what he writes. In fact, today, criticism is deeper than ever in the society in a constructive way. But our people also understand that the first law of the revolution is that a revolution must survive, must consolidate, so more benefits can come to them.

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And because of this fact, the revolution as laid down as a law, that nobody, regardless of who you are, will be allowed to be involved in any activity surrounding the overthrow of the government by the use of armed violence, and anyone who moves in that direction will be ruthlessly crushed.

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But we also feel sisters and brothers, that the time has in fact come for us to make another step along the way, towards institutionalising the process that we have been building for four years. And that is why only yesterday in Grenada, the new chairman of the Constitutional Commission, arrived in our capital cities St George's from Trinidad and Tobago to announce the formation of the Constitutional Commission that has now undertaken the task of drafting a new constitution for our young revolution.

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This constitution is not really going to look like the one that the Queen gave us in 1974. This time around this constitution is going to come out of the bowels of our people and out of our Earth. Our people will have their inputs and will decide what they want to see go into that constitution. Oh, a new constitution also is certainly going to institutionalise and entrench the systems of popular democracy, which we have been building over these past four years in our country.

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Because to us democracy is much, much more than just an election. To us democracy is a great deal more than just the right to put an X next to tweedledum name or tweedledee name every five years. But democracy also means, and to us it has five integrated components. First, accountability. People have to account to those who elect them. The second principle of democracy to us is responsibilities. We don't believe in Grenada in presidents for life, or elected people for life, we believe in service for life. And when you stop serving, you must be recalled and get out of the way for somebody else to serve.

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The third principle, to us the third principle of democracy is participatory mechanisms, popular participation, if we are serious about democracy, and here I would accept the definition, the well known definition, of Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln said of democracy, that it is government of, for and by the people. I accept that, it's a good definition. But if it is government of, for and by the people, then it cannot be just government of the people you elect. It also has to be for them, and also has to be by them, they have to have a way of participating. That is what the word by means and if that is absent, you don't really have the democracy. We believe that it is very important for the people to have a voice in running their affairs. The ways in which we have approached this question over these years is basically twofold. One the creation of mass organisations of all people, the National Women's Organisation, the National Youth Organisation, the Farmers Union, and of course, the labour unions trade unions. Not only were the women of our country were told to work before the revolution, the women of our country were also the most harassed and victimised of any section of our population. Those few who are granted jobs from time to time, many of them were given those jobs only on the basis of a sexual favor. So women were being sexually exploited in return for jobs. The very first decree of the revolution was to outlaw sexual victimisation and exploitation of all women in return for jobs.

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And going on from that sisters and brothers, the revolution then passed a law applying to all workers in the public sector of equal pay for equal work for all of the women in the public sector in our country. We also then passed another law more recently on maternity leave law. And by this maternity leave law, every woman who is pregnant must be granted three months maternity leave, two months with full pay, one could be withhold full pay and a guarantee of return to employment after the pregnancy.

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And it is because of these laws, and because of the new environment in the country, that so many women have begun to step forward, have begun to ask themselves, have begun to go out and find new jobs, have begun to get fully involved in production. And that is why to so many of them have joined their mass organization so that today, at this point in time, one in every three adult woman over the age of 16 years is a member of the national women's organization. So within our mass organizations, the principle of electability is already entrenched. And for our people in general, there have been some organs of popular democracy that have been built: zonal councils, parish councils, worker parish councils, farmer councils, where the people come together from month to month and the usual agenda would be a report on programs taking place in the village then there will be a report, usually, by some senior member of the bureaucracy. It might be the Manager of the Central Water Commission, or it might be the manager of a telephone company or the electricity company. And this senior bureaucrat has to go there and report to the people on his area of work, and then be submitted to a question and answer session. So this concept of democracy, and our approach to human rights is one that has stressed the solving of these problems and involvement of our people in a participatory way, from day to day, and week to week. They have also raised over and over again, the question of our relations with Cuba as a second one of these red herrings they drop. We say first of all, that yes, we have warm fraternal relations with the government and people of Cuba, that is true.

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We see Cuba as part of our Caribbean family of nations.

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One of the greatest curses of colonialism was that they divided region according to different metropolitan centers, they taught us different languages and then they made a great play of the fact that you are Dutch speaking, you are Spanish speaking, you are French speaking, you are English speaking, and more recently, you are American speaking.

48:05

And based on this linguistic nonsense, they taught us to hate each other. But the fact of the matter is, that they come down, they tell us if you speak in Dutch you the best, if is English, you the best, French is the best, Spanish is the best, American is the best, and all of us hating each other, when in fact we are one people from one Caribbean with one struggle and one destiny.

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We see it therefore as one of our historic duties and responsibilities to pull down these artificial barriers of colonialism and to develop that oneness and that unity that we nearly lost. We believe it is critically necessary to have close relations with all of our neighbors. But there is also a third reason that we will always have relations warm fraternal, close relations with the people and Government of Cuba. And that is our admiration and our respect for the internationalism and the achievements of the Cuban people.

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Whether they like it or not, Cuban internationalist soldiers have been the first in the world to charge the racist South African monster and to face them with arms in their hands while attending Angola.

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If there were no Cuban internationalist troops in Angola, how long ago would the South African apartheid monster have overrun and Angola with the assistance of several Western powers. They can choose their South African, and the Haitian and Chilean and South Korean and every piece that dictator friends they wish that is okay but we can't choose our friends because we too small and poor to have the rights to choose. They like to talk a lot about backyard and front yard and lake, Grenada in nobody backyard and aint part of nobody lake.

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The more desperate that imperialism gets, the more it comes up with the most vulgar and hostile measures to try to keep the poor oppressed people of the world who are trying to win their national liberation and to build their own future down. Think of Nicaragua, Nicaragua a country invaded over the years, two three times in this century by the United States. Nicaragua, a country that has been under the brutal heel of the Samosas for over 45 years. Nicaragua country that just like the Americans 200 years ago, finally resorted to their supreme right to overthrow their repressors and murderers and to take their destiny into their own hands.

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And when the people of Nicaragua, when the sons and daughters of Sandino assume their liberation, when they won in July of '79, what was the crime that they committed thereafter? Their crime was to be bold and mannish and fresh enough to say that their resources belong to them, to say that they want to build their country in their own way to say that they want to choose their own friends to say that they are going to build a country after their own image and likeness, and not after the image and likeness of somebody else.

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And because of that, you have this situation where today the most vulgar shameless act of the last year or so can only pale into comparison, when you put it against what is happening in El Salvador. Or when you place it against what happened in the middle of last year in Lebanon, when the Palestinian people were slaughtered.

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The most vulgar shameless act of open CIA activity in their country. The most open, vulgar shameless act of even admitting that not only will they resort to covert actions, but if necessary, they will publicly back overt action against the Nicaraguans. The shamelessness of it is really extraordinary and perhaps the only good thing that has come out of this recent episode sisters and brothers, is the fact that for the first time in a long time, the people of Latin America themselves have tried to find a solution to the problem. That has been the historic meaning of the get together of Venezuela and Colombia, Mexico and Panama on Contadora, to launch the Contadora initiative, because what this Contadora initiative is all about is really extremely important for us. It says, first of all, that we the people of Latin America and the Caribbean will try to solve our problems ourselves.

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It says secondly, that we do not accept the use of violence as a means of settling our disputes. And it says forcefully that we are not prepared to accept that any country in our region far less any country, outside or region has the right to interfere in the internal affairs of another country.

56:29

But these people have also thrown out another allegation against Grenada. This other allegation concerns the question of our international airport project. This one is of course, the most comical one of all. According to the formulators of this famous theory Grenada's International Airport is now going to become a military base. It will now become a strategic jumping off point from where we can launch an attack on the great big powerful mighty United States. It looks like we have become a superpower.

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But the reality of the airport of course, is well known to all those who make those statements. This airport is an enchanted dream of the people of our country.

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This International Airport has undergone a quarter century of studies. All previous governments from 1955 have spoken about the need for the airport. And if you understand the situation in our country, that will be no surprise to anybody. The present airport is called Pearls. Pearls has a strip 5,500 feet long, that means only turbo prop planes can come in. The turbo prop planes that come in carry a maximum of 48 passengers. And better still, these planes can only land during the day between six and six because there are no nightlights. The question of the length of the strip, the basis on which we had to be make a strip of 9,000 feet is because all of the manuals that were done by European and American companies, I can think of McDonnell Douglas, people who do have DC eight and so on. I can think of the Boeing's they have produced manuals saying what length of strip is required if the planes are to land. So unless we born big and stupid, you can't expect us to produce a strip that planes that can carry people, normal jet planes won't be able to use. So the fact of the matter is the 9,000 feet was dictated by the necessity for that. This international project as we see it is the gateway to our future. As we see it, it is what alone can give us the potential for economic takeoff. As we see it, it can help us to develop the tourism industry more, can help us to develop our agro industries more, can help us to export our fresh fruits and vegetables better. That is why we have made an exception this year. Usually every year at the end of December, we announce what the next year will be called, you know a year of education and production or whatever it is. But last month, six and a half months ahead of schedule, we announced our people What the name of next year will be so they can start from now to mobilize including mobilizing overseas around the name because 1984 next year will be called the year of the International Airport.

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And the fact of the matter is, next year is also significant for us. Because in the 13th of March '84, it will be the fifth anniversary of the revolution

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and therefore, what we want to do during the fifth festival on the 13th of March itself is to open our international airport on that day. Long live the people of free Grenada. Long live the workers, farmers, youth and women of free Grenada, long live the people of the United States. Long live Grenada, US relations and friendship, long live the people of Cuba and Nicaragua, long live the people of Angola and Mozambique, long live the people of Palestine.