**National Address to Declare Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month Open**

SALUTATION: Greetings fellow citizens of Grenada, Carriacou & Petit Martinique…

Today I greet you on behalf of the Grenada National Coalition on the Rights of the Child and its Partners, as we observe the month of April as Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month.

Each April, Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month activities raise awareness about the problem of child abuse – and most importantly, about what each of us can do to help prevent the abuse and neglect of Our Nation’s children.

The theme for this year is Action now! Protecting Our Future!

Too often we think of the problem of Child Abuse as so pervasive that it can’t be stopped, so complex that it would never be solved. We should never accept this to be normal and acceptable. Child abuse hurts! Let the knowledge of the long-lasting impact of Child abuse anger us, and compel us to take action now, until all our children are safe, from all forms of abuse.

We commend our police officers, child protection officers, social workers, doctors, nurses and other professionals, who are first responders and are dealing with incidents of child abuse on a daily basis or attempting to repair the damage and harm caused by it. We recognise their efforts as critical and practical within the comprehensive system to deal with child abuse. But today, this month, let us focus on prevention; to stop the abuse from happening in the first place.

Let us challenge ourselves, to create a society that is free of Child Abuse.

It is important that we strengthen our families to effectively manage stress and create a healthy cohesive unit by providing parents and guardians with the right tools to enable them to appropriately deal with challenges in caring for their children.

As Grenadians we share a genuine concern for children, we generally see them as vulnerable and in need of care. However, many of us grew up in families, with the “tough love concept”, “licks didn’t kill me, and it won’t kill them” approach to raising children. Yes, we survived in spite of our own childhood experiences of abuse and sometimes we can only imagine a society where we adopt the same approaches that we are accustomed to.

However, if we can visualise a society free of child abuse, we might be able to desire it and become motivated to work towards it. Imagine a society where children are confident because their lives have been filled with encouragement, where children love themselves because they are surrounded by acceptance and approval, where children are respectful because they were taught that they are precious and valuable and see others in the same way. Imagine a Grenada where children believe in truth and fairness because their life experiences confirm that fairness and justice will prevail; where children are trusting because they feel safe and know they will be protected from all forms of harm whether at home, at school or in the community. Many of us were robbed of this opportunity, to grow up in a society like this, but we should not rob our children of it as well.

Child abuse is a national tragedy, affecting hundreds of children and families every year. We need to work together to help heal the wounds of those suffering from their experiences of childhood abuse. Besides supporting and strengthening families so they can become a strong and cohesive unit, we have to abandon negative attitudes and belief system that perpetuate the harmful practices so that we can prevent such tragedies from occurring.

As parents, guardians, teachers and leaders we are entrusted with the responsibility of rearing these “little people”. We are obligated to provide them with a safe environment free from physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect so they can achieve their fullest potential.

As the Grenada National Coalition on the Rights of the Child marks Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month, this April they will appreciate your support in joining them in the activities planned. There will be radio and television talks and discussions. There will also be school visits and public awareness campaigns in various parishes. Members of the public are encouraged to offer assistance in whatever way you can. You may have skills that can be very useful to the organisation’s work or for the activities they have planned for the month. Call the GNCRC office on 435-0944 or visit them on Lucas Street in St George’s and volunteer your support.

Now, on behalf of the Grenada National Coalition on the Rights of the Child, I thank you for listening as I declare April 2018 Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month open.

Take Action Now! Prevent the Abuse!

I thank you.