

The President's Address
by
The Most Honourable Dame Sandra Mason
President of Barbados

Mr. President and Members of the Senate;

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly;

Specially invited guests, ladies and gentlemen;

These Houses of Parliament sit today, joining with the people of our new Republic in celebration of our democracy; to reaffirm our common bonds as the people of this nation; to build enhanced trust between the governed and those who lead; and to construct a stronger nation-state in which all our people have their fair share.

Fifty-five years after it was initiated, we can make boast that our sovereignty as an Independent Nation is now truly our own.

We are here assembled for the start of the first parliamentary term since our transition to republican status. We acknowledge our history, accomplishments, traditions and values and we look to the future with keen anticipation. In so doing, we are reminded of the words of renowned Barbadian writer, George Lamming, who said, "*The architecture of our future is not only unfinished; the scaffolding has hardly gone up.*"

We, the people of this parliamentary republic, must now commit ourselves to the higher calling of building “the architecture of our future” and to “Owning Our Future.”

Against this backdrop, my Government presents to the country, the new policy initiatives which will build upon and continue the policy and legislative agenda of the last Parliament.

My Government will anchor its approach to this new term on five (5) core values:

- **Value 1 - People-Centred Leadership**, which is visionary and decisive, compassionate and caring, keeps Barbados and Barbadians safe and helps to secure an equitable and fair future for all.
- **Value 2 - Government Must Deliver For ALL**, by becoming a model of ethical leadership which inspires confidence and builds public trust by delivering on its promises; creating a people-centred culture; being fair; transparent; inclusive; efficient; and by incentivising the public and private sectors and individual citizens to perform and to embrace excellence. Further, as the country’s largest employer and service provider, the government must deliver to all its stakeholders, including employees, customers, and suppliers.
- **Value 3 - Pride and Industry Through Active Citizenship**, in which our people are equally conscious and protective of their rights as well as their responsibilities. My Government will seek to create a more giving, participatory and engaged society for Barbadians at home and in the diaspora; a society in which the views of our people are heard and acted

on and we work in unity in the cause of our republic, our human, social, economic, environmental and relational capital.

- **Value 4 - Bajan Ownership Matters**, whether it is the ownership of voice and agency which increases citizens' participation in governance; ownership of property which will create the largest property-owning democracy in our region; or the ownership of capital and wealth to guarantee new levels of economic enfranchisement and prosperity for all citizens.

- **Value 5 - Innovation Drives Opportunity**, which is potentially transformative of the financial circumstances of individuals, improves quality of life, solves social and environmental challenges and accelerates economic growth and national development.

The core values will undergird the new policy frameworks which my Government intends to put in place, supported by drivers of national transformation of Barbados – quality of life; ownership and financial security; benefits from renewable energy; home ownership; community and family life; national identity and active citizenship; education and skills; governance and government operations; jobs and decent work opportunities in new sectors; health and well-being; infrastructure and public spaces; resilience and safety.

Through these drivers of national transformation, my Government is determined to create a new prosperity for all citizens; an improved governance; an enhanced polity and a more engaged citizenry.

Building The Architecture of Our Future

Transformational Governance

This new term begins with a smaller Cabinet and an enhanced system of Committees of Parliament aimed at effecting wider national discussion and greater consultation with citizens on proposed legislation and Bills. There will now be three standing committees. The Committees will be provided with adequate staff and resources and will address matters relating to Governance, Economic Issues, Social and Environmental Matters.

While the introduction of new Standing Committees will enhance the way in which our Parliament functions, Barbados' recent transition to parliamentary republic status makes this an appropriate juncture to establish a Commission on the Reform of Parliament to be led by the former President of the Senate, Sir Richard Cheltenham.

My Government recognises that good governance is pivotal to maintaining public trust and confidence and convincing members of the public that the political process and public institutions work in their best interest. My Government therefore intends to reorient the focus of its operations to be more citizen-centric in order to make people's lives better; make processes easier and more efficient and to make policy impactful and valuable for all Barbadians.

The people of Barbados can expect from my Government stronger focus on clear communication, timeliness of governmental decisions with the continued reforms and digitization transformation currently in train, accuracy and timeliness of official reports and enforcement of applicable laws and

regulations; all with the ultimate purpose of maximising value for the entire society through a fair, just and efficient allocation of state resources, guaranteeing availability and access for those with the greatest needs.

This thrust will encompass an all-of-government approach, including central government, statutory boards, regulatory agencies, State-Owned Enterprises, PPPs, and other enterprises in which government has an interest. This infrastructure will also promote enterprise and competitiveness and assist in the enhancement of productivity, growth and investor confidence.

Building on the enactment of legislation to protect whistleblowers and stop corruption, as well as an Act to ensure fairness, honesty and transparency in public procurement and public finances, my Government will bring back to Parliament the Integrity In Public Life Bill; introduce a Freedom of Information Act for increased transparency in governance; implement the recommendations of the Thorne Commission on Local Governance to give the public more say in national affairs and implement measures to improve ethics and management systems in central government and state-owned enterprises.

In the area of citizen security and the justice system, my Government has zero tolerance for guns, crime and violence and will seek to reform the criminal justice system while simultaneously combating crime at the community level. Specifically targeting interpersonal violence, promoting strong community bonds, offering classes in conflict resolution and negotiating skills and making early interventions with wayward youth. A more sensitive justice system intended to rehabilitate the offenders for useful lives is in the process of being developed. Similarly, community-based approaches for domestic violence will

be pursued, including training, counseling and support to help offenders change and support victims.

My Government recommits to a system of restorative justice, undertaking criminal justice reforms, reforming court processes to include computerised management systems, rationalising the structure of the Supreme Court, and the establishment of a specialised Family Court to deal with matters relating to children and relationships between couples. The Family Court will join together, for the first time, all areas and entities affecting the practice of family law. There will be an emphasis on Juvenile Justice legislation, childcare, welfare, probation, domestic violence, and reform to the payment of maintenance. These initiatives are designed to take away much of the toxicity arising from the breakdown of relationships. There will be a greater utilisation of mediation designed to salvage and maintain relationships wherever possible.

My Government fervently believes that deepening our democracy can only redound to our individual and collective benefit. Participation in government is not for a select few: It - is - for - ALL. A distinctive feature of this parliamentary term will be the use of mechanisms to answer the call of many citizens and residents to have a greater say in their everyday lives and the processes of national governance.

These mechanisms are intended to amplify the citizens' voice in national affairs, beyond the ballot box, to People's Assemblies where they can more directly influence the running of their communities. At every level, my Government is prepared to be held accountable.

Our citizens will be encouraged to be more philanthropic, to give back to Barbados, to be active agents in national development and to build a robust Third Sector, or Volunteer and Giving Sector which fosters international investment in social causes and national advancement, together with volunteerism by nationals willingly giving their time, skill, resources or networks for the good and further development of our country.

Transformational Social Policy

A New Approach to Social Services

My Government will tackle the complex, systemic challenges faced by citizens who are attempting to cope with multiple challenges. My Government will reform the welfare system and establish a family services authority aimed at bringing all public social services under one Directorate. Legislation will also be enacted to allow paternity leave for fathers who want to be part of the critical first months of their children's lives.

Protection of Workers

Having introduced a national minimum wage, my Government will bring to the Parliament in the early days of the new term, a Trade Union Recognition and Collective Bargaining Bill. A policy will be developed on remote work and the impact of technology on the job security of the Barbadian worker will be studied, including a comparative analysis of models relating to work life balance, to find mechanisms for relieving worker stress. New protective policies will be put in place guaranteeing a new deal for domestic workers, workers in the tourism and hospitality sector and workers in the agricultural sector.

Educating For The Future Barbados

Educational policy and opportunities will continue to be a main plank of national development. A new Education Act will replace the Education Act of 1983. The new legislation will be more suited to modern policy, teaching, and management in today's educational system. Training in STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) will be accelerated; the 11+ examination will be abolished in favour of a system of Middle Schools and the establishment of Schools of Excellence in the Arts, Sciences, Commerce, ICT, Technical Skills and areas pivotal to national development.

Education will be more focused on problem solving, critical thinking and life-long learning. There will be continuous effort to train teachers and civil servants, to upskill the national population, to train artisans and a new core of male and female construction workers to fill the jobs in the coming building boom, of which I will speak shortly. Every Barbadian child and young person will be supported in self-actualization through education and training, to achieve their aspirations within the scope of their abilities and God-given talents. Government's goal is to encourage confident creatives, thinkers, change agents and thought leaders, not to write off our children and our young people.

Housing A Nation

Across the Caribbean, housing is one of the most unmet demands of regional populations. My Government proposes to undertake the most ambitious housing programme ever seen in this country in order to house our citizens, finally bringing to an end the perpetually long waiting lists at the National Housing Corporation, ensure Barbadians ownership of "a piece of the rock,"

and to construct the largest property-owning democracy in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Acting on its own initiative and in partnership and joint venture programmes with the private sector, the Government will build 10,000 houses during this term and place photovoltaic panels on the roofs of 50,000 low-income houses, ultimately, ending electricity bills and turning these houses into revenue generators for their owners. To promote home ownership amongst our youth, housing grants of \$3,000 will be given to first time homeowners, under 35 years of age, to be used in the transaction.

Using planning obligations from major developments, my Government will develop an affordable housing programme to reduce density in public housing estates. In addition, my government will continue programmes to upgrade the electrical and plumbing infrastructure of those units.

Moreover, land tax will no longer be charged on properties with improved values up to \$400,000 in any location in Barbados. As a first step, the removal of property taxes on values up to \$300,000 will be implemented in this first year. With respect to properties with improved value over that sum, land taxes will not be charged on the first \$400,000 of property value, only on the balance.

Economic Policy

A Smart Barbados

Leveraging the technology, my Government intends to transform Barbados and its citizens into a *Smart Nation* and a full-fledged innovative economy

through the maximization of world-class technologies. WiFi and broadband will be made available to all citizens, especially those in housing estates and rural areas. My Government believes that consistent with full self-governance and our republican status, there must be the building of new wealth, ownership opportunities and economic prosperity shared by all citizens.

Digital Barbados

This will be accomplished by the creation of MyEconomy which will offer a digital account to every Barbadian, offering web publishing and e-payments systems to enable our nationals to share or sell digital content to the world. In this way, we will expand the local economy beyond our physical borders, eliminate the constraints of a small market and limited population size, and open new opportunities for FinTech, Cryptocurrencies and blockchain. The further expansion of the Digitisation of government services and access to information will enable greater speed, efficiency and ease of doing business for Barbadians and international investors. My government will also establish special economic zones for Life Sciences and FinTech.

Barbados Wealth Fund

Wealth for Barbadians will be generated through the development of the Barbados Wealth Fund which will give equity stakes to nationals in government-held revenue generating assets. My Government will also divest its interest in Sam Lord's Hotel to credit unions and similar institutions for the benefit of their memberships.

Energy Transport and Infrastructure

My Government will ensure that renewable energy improves the quality of citizens' lives, benefits the environment and generates income for nationals.

To this end, my Government will establish a Green Energy Park at Vacluse. In addition, Government will work with the Green Climate Fund and investors to establish a Green Investment Bank, to initially finance \$150 million of investments that support economic sustainability, including hurricane-safe roofs, rainwater harvesting, small renewable energy projects and green bonds.

The national transport and energy sectors will be transitioned to green sectors. The fleet of the Transport Board has already benefited from 49 new electric buses with air conditioning, charging ports and WiFi. My Government has augmented the national transport system with private sector vehicles to improve frequency of service on certain routes where there were insufficient buses in operation. As its next step in the development of an effective transport service, my Government will establish the Barbados Mass Transit Authority.

Given the vulnerability of our island home to the impacts of the climate crisis, and having regard to the serious consequences of Category 1 Hurricane Elsa, which caused loss of property and substantial expenditure, resilient infrastructure is imperative and will be built throughout the island. The beneficiary sectors will include the housing, construction, water, energy, agriculture and transport sectors. Further, the programme will make low and middle-income homes more resilient to extreme weather events and the consequential loss of electric power and potable water. Additionally it will make road infrastructure climate resilient; restore the reduced coral reef ecosystem, particularly on the west and south coasts of the island.

Special Economic Zones

To give further boost to the economy, my Government will introduce legislation to set up Special Economic Zones to attract new investment to the island.

Food and Nutritional Security

My Government's agricultural focus will be centred around technology driven production for food and nutrition security, making the lives of farmers easier and attracting young people to agriculture as a viable career option. We will work with the private sector and labour to facilitate the new ownership and operation of sugar factories. This will be premised on our factories generating renewable energy year round. Given the chronic shortage of water, we will continue to augment affordable access to water for farmers islandwide. My Government will also undertake a national regeneration policy for our soils to boost agricultural production.

My Government will actively work to increase the capacity of small farmers to benefit from its land lease programmes across the island and will see two hundred Barbadians benefitting from the Lears Land Lease Project and scores of others from the rehabilitation of the Bath Estate.

High Value Manufacturing

Manufacturing will be boosted in wines and spirits, to position Barbadian food innovations for the global markets, for industrial design, and the establishment of High-tech, open-equipment manufacturer facilities for the creation of Medical Equipment, Clothing and Apparel, Furniture and Home Accessories.

Small Business

My Government will lease operating space to small business persons such as mechanics and autobody repair technicians; and support micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs). My Government will also attract new low-cost providers of money transfers, payments and electronic wallets to offer new financial services to Barbadians. In addition, my Government will create a new deal with public infrastructure workers by transferring ownership of all its construction and maintenance equipment to UCAL for lease back on an as-needed basis.

Future Commerce

My Government will establish 'Future Commerce' by building a network of the world's most innovative and forward-looking companies, development institutions and 500 local companies, including MSMEs, to access innovation opportunities; identify and access the best disruptive technologies around the globe; and create new Bajan businesses in key global centres.

My Government will also identify outstanding champions of existing and emerging industries from around the world and pair them with local industry leaders or emerging leaders under the umbrella of Global Advisory Councils. We will ensure that we harness the best global and local ideas to transform and grow every sector and position Barbados to be on the cutting edge of every industry through these global engagements. My Government will zealously protect the reputation of Barbados, its international financial services sector and the foreign exchange earnings therefrom.

Tourism

Bajan Ownership of the Tourism Sector matters. Despite the losses occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Barbados brand remains very strong as is demonstrated by a high level of winter bookings.

My Government will further diversify our economy to ensure that a greater share of tourism business and revenues go into the pockets of ordinary Bajans. All Bajans must be owners in the tourism sector. To achieve this, New Community Tourism Villages will be established across Barbados. The Villages will be focused on creating locally owned tourism spaces within communities.

It is intended that these spaces will create substantial revenues for ordinary Barbadians, increase small business and entrepreneurship, thereby moving some of the tourism earnings from the traditional players to ordinary Barbadians. The Community Tourism Villages which will also utilise the gullies around the island for green tourism, will provide tourists with more authentic, enjoyable, immersive, local experiences which they so often seek.

The Government will establish an Aviation Strategy and Civil Aviation Authority of Barbados to elevate Barbados as an international transport aviation hub for the Southern Caribbean, to attract new carriers and new businesses which generate jobs. My Government expects opportunities for Bajans in areas such as aircraft maintenance, operations and flight training. Barbados will also open new source markets with airlift and marketing, in Kenya and Ghana in Africa, and in Qatar and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East.

Construction Boom

My Government expects a building boom in Barbados from the start of multiple public and private sector projects with planning approvals. Projects for public

sector expenditure include sewerage solutions for the Belle, Belleview, Bailey's Alley and Chapman Lane; the Speightstown and Constitution River flood mitigation; placing solar panels on the roofs of all government buildings; national road rehabilitation; and training programmes for nationals. My Government's expenditure on these programmes will amount to \$122.5 million.

Private Sector projects are even more extensive and amount to an expenditure of \$1.4 billion. Such projects include, inter alia, Indigo Hotel, the Hyatt Ziva Hotel, Sam Lord's Castle, Sagicor Estates, Discovery Bay/Royalton, Margaritaville, Marriott refurbishment, Apes Hill expansion, Sandals expansion, Crane expansion, Townhouses at Porters, and a cineplex and commercial centre at Welches, St Thomas. Cumulatively, these projects will generate 5,050 construction jobs of various types and approximately 3600 full time jobs.

In order to ensure Barbadians get these jobs, my Government will embark on its construction gateway programme. This will include a rapid training programme for both male and female construction workers and workers with related skills. The construction training will have a component of attachments to master craftspersons and artisans. Together with the public sector projects and Government's housing programme, this term will witness one of the largest construction booms ever in the history of our island.

Sustainable Development

The protection of the environment is important to our growth and our way of life as island people. Communities have a vested interest in ensuring the environmental quality of their community is of the standard that they want for

themselves and their children. Community based activities will increase the incomes of the residents of the local communities.

My Government will preserve our green spaces, particularly our gardens, gullies, parks and beaches. Work on the National Botanical Gardens will continue and we will also have a new a home for geriatric patients at this location. My Government will embark on a national project to rehabilitate the gullies to ensure they remain natural green spaces for low impact use, the preservation of flora and fauna and community assets which generate revenue for residents of surrounding areas.

I am sure that many of you are pleased with the national household waste management programme and the new garbage bins and recycling containers being distributed. The next phase of the programme will see the roll out a National Recycling Campaign fully utilizing the bins provided to all households across Barbados.

The Blue Economy

We are an ocean state with control of a body of water up to 400 times larger in marine space than the island itself. Our sustainable development is inextricably linked to our ability to not only harness the potential of, but protect and manage, these bountiful waters. My Government will prioritise research and development of renewable ocean energy including but not limited to:

- Wind (with over 150 MW planned to be installed by 2030)
- Conversion of sargassum to a biofuel
- Potential production of hydrogen
- Ocean thermal energy conversion

and will consider how to fully address our deep-sea oil, gas and mineral wealth.

While these major initiatives are being pursued, my Government will continue the plans for expanding our share of the cruise and shipping, developing Barbados as a yachting hub and restructuring the Ships' Registry.

Culture, heritage, sports and health straddle the divide between social and economic considerations. I will now present my Government's proposals for these sectors.

An Orange Economy

Our heritage and culture are the mirror image of our country's and people's self-definition and self-identity. It is who we are. They are as much a part of the country as its physical landscape and are carried within the bosom and psyche of every citizen. Culture and heritage also have mass appeal and commercial value.

My Government will therefore significantly enhance the cultural, creative and heritage economy, through "Eventful Barbados" a 52-week event calendar; turning Barbados' city and main towns into hubs for entertainment and leisure; prioritise the use of indigenous cultural forms such as literature, film, gaming, theatre, animation and dance, among others, in the delivery of education at the nursery, primary and secondary levels.

Queen's Park will be transformed into the cultural hub of the island, complete with performance and rehearsal spaces, studios, retail shops, public art and artists-in-residence studios; the administrative offices of the NCF will also be relocated to this site.

Emphasis will be placed on Reclaiming Our Atlantic Destiny (ROAD) as the children of the African Diaspora, by fully developing as a cultural and heritage district, the African Slaves Burial Ground at Newton, Christ Church with the relocation of the Archives, an appropriate interactive museum and related cultural facilities.

Further, my Government will complete transformative projects such as the establishment of a state-of-the-art soundstage and production campus and the Heritage District at Newton. These projects will be leveraged to enhance Barbados' digital content production. The Barbados Landship will be revitalised through the establishment of Landship Docks in schools and communities. The annual Crop Over and the Season of Emancipation will be modernised and scaled up. These new initiatives will generate income for nationals from food vendors to creatives, from truck delivery drivers to nail technicians, to those who rent party supplies of various types.

Sports

My Government will develop a full-fledged sports local economy through investment and modern development of high-quality Youth and Community championships, merchandising and media products, the establishment of a secondary school of excellence for sports careers, and the overhauling the National Sports Council to be the driver of youth and community sports and well-being. In addition, my Government will develop 15 mini stadia across the island and will continue the work of regrading and lighting playing fields and the installation of bleachers and the maintenance of community grounds to allow for increased sporting activity at the community level.

The Government will also complete the work already started and establish a regional horse-racing academy to provide an opportunity for young people to gain critical skills which will afford them the opportunity to secure many of the various jobs in the horseracing sector. My Government will also prioritise the further development of Wildey as a multi-disciplinary sporting centre in Barbados; build a Cricket Academy utilising the wealth of local expertise and provide Bds \$1 million from the Arts and Sports Fund, as an initial seed investment in the execution of the implementation plan. We will also develop Road Tennis as an International Sport; aid in the global establishment of a World Road Tennis Federation (WRTF) which will provide an opportunity for athletes in this sporting discipline to earn income - utilizing Barbados' overseas missions to support and build out Road Tennis internationally.

Health

Introduction of a Corps of Community Nurses

A system of community nursing will be established to promote greater self-care, reduce the high incidence of chronic noncommunicable diseases, enable preventative interventions and promote early diagnosis of illnesses such as cancer. In support of our elderly population, a new geriatric hospital will be constructed and the care of the elderly programme with private nursing homes will be expanded. Government will also encourage organisations such as credit and trade unions to build day care and residential facilities for the elderly. Legislation will also be enacted to protect seniors from physical, emotional and financial abuse.

Other Preventive Interventions

The chronic noncommunicable diseases are the largest cause of death and disability in Barbados and the Caribbean. My Government will introduce interventions in primary health care aimed at reducing the incidence of the NCDs, identifying them in the household setting so as to allow for better outcomes. We will establish a National Task Force on Wellness to advise the Government.

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Having built a new Accident and Emergency Department, the upgrading of the plant and services at the QEH will continue. My Government will act in the support of the Board, for the Master planning of QEH infrastructure. This will include the relocation of outpatients and administrative services from Martindale's Road to other locations to allow maximum use of the building for patient services, building a new laboratory, and a much-needed carpark. Digital transformation will evolve QEH to a smart hospital with automated inventory, electronic medical records, and providing seamless access to information between the hospital and its multiple locations. We are committed to improving the patient experience.

Regional and International Relations

The building of strategic relationships with likeminded persons, organisations and countries can add value to Barbados' foreign policy and national life, in addition to creating strong support at the times and in the global fora and places where support is needed. Development in our new republic must be sustainable and built on strong relationships. My Government will actively pursue relationship building based on common values; protection of the national interest; commercial and trade diplomacy and global advocacy by strengthening Barbados' relationships with traditional friends and partners,

particularly those in the United States, United Kingdom and the European Union; deepening our fraternal relationship with CARICOM; forging new bridges with our Latin American neighbours; reaching out to Asia on grounds of common interests; and seeking and nurturing new bonds with Africa and further advancing Barbados' position as an advocate for small island developing states.

My Government will strengthen and leverage the Bajan Diaspora, its contacts, skills sets, relationships, and love of Barbados to attract investment, as well as repatriate resources and support in the building out of Barbados' Human, Social, Economic, Environmental and Relational Capital.

We shall also establish a Global Diplomacy Accelerator Programme which identifies and matches emerging and established talent at all stages of professional development.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, Barbados must prepare for a post-COVID future, craft new and relevant strategies for development and wealth creation, protect our environment and build resilience so that no matter the nature of the challenges confronting us, we shall ensure a fair share for all of our citizens. That is what my Government, through these strategies, is committed to achieving.

This is a historic moment; we must celebrate ourselves and look to the future with a sense of hope. At the beginning of today's address, conscious of our new status, I rooted my remarks in a Barbadian author, George Lamming and it is only fitting that I close in the same vein. Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite, in his work "*nine mesongs fe the new millennium*" pens the words which stand as a guide for our nation and people.

I quote him now...

*"... Be great cultivators. both of soil and soul. because is only in that way
will there be a Tomorrow's Harvest...*

*If you live on an island love it love it love it. but remember no man is an
island – and that no island belong to one man*

*Be always part of something larger than yrself
Something that will make you larger than yrself – part of the island part of
the region. part of the main.*

*Educate yrself yr children & yr community in/to these things in the way they
shd go – in the way we shd grow. So think on these things dream on these
things. act on these dreams"*

My Government charges the people of this nation, whether at home or abroad and all who consider themselves friends of Barbados, to let us dream together, let us build the republic of which our forefathers could only dream, and to which our children can now aspire and realise.

May Almighty God, our Creator, bless Barbados and all her people.