

## **Honourable Premier Donaldson Romeo 2019 New Year Statement**

First, let me wish a happy, God-blessed new year to the people of Montserrat young and old, near and far; to all citizens, residents, visitors and friends. May we all go forward with God together in this New Year which God has graciously allowed us to see.

As we move forward into 2019, there is great hope and good reason to be optimistic. Over the past two years we have been blessed with several breakthroughs that open up opportunities to build a sound future. Yes, the sea port, the undersea fibre optic cable, geothermal and solar energy development, the pending hospital, the EU funding, the new growth strategy, a five-year capital programme, several investment opportunities and more are now open before us, as I discussed in my recent interview with our acting Communications Director.

In the past four years the Government of Montserrat (GoM) has been able to weave the landscape that now projects the opportunity for growth, development and a thriving economy. We stood on our own two feet before this crisis, and after 23 years of resilience training, we are ready to do it again.

First I must give some good news on private sector investment initiatives. For example, in Dick Hill the Art Housing project has put in place the foundations and the road infrastructure to the 10 unit villa project. The next stage will resume where we shall see the buildings going up. This was confirmed on my recent visit to the UK. Meanwhile, we continue to advance potential projects in water bottling and the digital sector of our economy. These projects will provide services to the outside world and bring significant employment and revenue to the Government and People of Montserrat.

Let us now take note of the progress with various ongoing projects. Some of the following projects are more visible than others, but we are making good progress that will help us to build a solid future:

**Carr's Bay Bridge:** With funding in place, we can all see that frameworks have been set up, concrete has been poured for the main bridge structures and work is ongoing. The bridge deck, base and vertical walls are already in place. The wing walls, the catchment, the outfall and the head walls will follow. Works on the Carr's Bay Bridge are scheduled to be completed by January 31<sup>st</sup>.

**Barzeys Road and bridge:** We have completed 820ft of concrete roadway with an average width of 20ft. The work also required kerbs, drains, retaining walls, building a bridge and re-aligning the roadway. The resilience, safety and access on this section of road have been greatly improved as a result of the works completed.

**Sea Port, Phase 1:** A year ago, Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) approved 14.4M pounds (about EC \$50 million) for the development of Port Little Bay under the UKCIF fund. GoM will provide an additional 7M pounds (EC 24 Million) to assist with the project expenditure. CDB & GoM have developed Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the procurement of the Project Manager, Marine Consultants, Environmental and Social Impact Assessment Consultant (ESIA). Land has to be acquired; asking prices suggest that we will need to take the compulsory acquisition process route.

The Public Procurement Board has issued an award letter in Dec 2018 to STANTEC Consultants out of Barbados, who will be on island in early January 2019. A Project Coordinator for the Port project is expected to be in place by February 2019. The ESIA for the Port Project will be done by the Technical Consultants, to meet a deadline of Mar 2019. The Technical Consultants will also advance the tender process for the Design Build Contractor. This should start in June or July. Under the European Development Fund (EDF), the Port project must be completed by 2020/21.

**Airport:** Construction drawings for the new Air Traffic Control Tower are nearly complete and tender documents are being developed. The Prefabricated Cab for the Tower was expected on island by end of December 2018. Of the EC\$2.315m of GoM/Department for International Development (DFID) and EU funding for this project, EC\$961,531.00 has been spent on the Cab. EC\$324,732.04 has been spent on equipment for the new Air Traffic Control Tower. The remainder will be spent on a final payment for the pre-fabricated cab, as well as on the construction of the Shaft.

**Fibre Optics Cable:** This is a priority project for GoM and DfID. It will greatly enhance resiliency of our communications in the face of hurricanes and open the way for a powerful digital sector in our economy. Funding of about £5 millions is assured. The request for proposals is being finalized and should go to the Market this month. It will then take another month to have a contract in place. We intend to have the fibre optic cable in place for the peak of the Hurricane season, August.

**Hospital and healthcare:** The hospital project is a part of the five-year capital programme being further developed with the UK, which helps to secure funding. A steering committee is being set up for the project. Wider ongoing developments include better pediatric care, improved psychiatric care, sharing of anaesthesiology resources with neighbouring islands and creation of Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs). Options are being explored for better air ambulance services to Guadeloupe. Healthcare in Montserrat continues to benefit from technical support through the UK departments, such as Public Health England and the Department of Health, as well as DFID

and FCO in meeting its international health obligations while we address local challenges.

**ZJB New Building:** This is now nearing completion and the Station will soon be moving house. Equipment for the new building was successfully tendered and a new generator should arrive shortly. While waiting on the new equipment to arrive I have given the directive for them to occupy and broadcast from the New ZJB building with our present equipment.

**250 kW Solar PV project:** This project is expected to be completed by the middle of March and will increase the resilience of our Electricity supply through solar energy. Upon completion the roof top solar installation is expected to produce 250 kw of solar energy. This project's capacity is approximately 10% of our peak power load, and it is intended to develop a second phase, of 750 kW, as was announced last November when CARICOM Energy Month was launched here. Installation is scheduled to begin on the 14th January 2019. The total expenditure to-date has been \$870,490.

**Geothermal Well 3:** Regarding the drilling of the third well, DFID will provide an update on the negotiation between DFID and Iceland Drilling Company (IDC). This should inform the strategic approach on the final drilling completion and development of the third well.

**Geothermal power plant:** GOM has completed an early market engagement on the development of a geothermal surface plant to generate electricity. DFID and GOM after assessing the early market engagement report agreed to move to the geothermal generation stage. The technical assistance required for the geothermal surface plant development and implementation will be financed by DFID.

**Housing:** We were able to provide permanent housing to five households who were able to enjoy their first Christmas living in their new homes. Montserratians have a strong desire to own a piece of the rock and as a result we will be providing new lots in the Lookout Area. We intend to extend the Drummonds housing development, through the construction of another complex with six two-bedroom apartments. We are presently negotiating with Dfid, our funding partner, to build a number of new homes over the next five years.

**Port Buildings Project:** Work was to be done on the Montserrat Port Authority (MPA) warehouse roof and on the Ferry terminal. Of the EC\$1.1M, spend to date is \$670,000. The other \$430,000 is to be spent on the Office Accommodation and the final aspects of the Ferry Terminal Canopy. The project is 85% complete and works are expected to be completed by March 2019. The MPA roof repairs and Ferry Terminal Canopy Cover are completed, including construction of a staircase, a verandah at the arrival section, paving

works and reconfiguration of the fencing. The anticipated Canopy which will form the roof for the newly paved areas will be installed shortly.

**Liquid Waste Management Project:** This project has four components: [1] the Margetson Sewage Treatment Plant, [2] The Lookout warden assisted accommodation walkway, [3] the Lookout warden assisted accommodation sewage balancing tank and [4] the New Windward sewage stabilization ponds. The first three components are already completed. Work on the New Windward ponds is still in progress. The installation of the pond liners was delayed due to late arrival. Completion of this project is now scheduled for later this month.

**Tourism:** The new tourism director will now be in place shortly. It is anticipated that he will advance the discussion of the formal twinning of Montserrat and Antigua as one tourist destination. The future looks bright for the anticipated EU funded tourism development which would increase the tourism dollars for the private sector.

Another key sign of progress comes from the testimony to the Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) by Lord Ahmad, Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) Minister for Overseas Territories, on December 18<sup>th</sup> 2018. This is the same FAC that I testified before and also submitted written evidence.

In his testimony Lord Ahmad confirmed that along with the Secretary of State, (Penny Mordaunt) and his colleague Lord Bates, the view they are now taking involves much more long-term support of Capital projects in Montserrat as in each British Overseas Territory. He confirmed that we are working through the details of a £30 million-plus programme supporting infrastructure. However, having surveyed our needs, GoM asked for significantly more than £50 million.

GoM acknowledges and thank Lord Ahmad and Lord Bates for the critical role they have played so far in the negotiations over the 5-year Capital programme. For it is time we agree a real programme of action to recreate a civilized home for the People of Montserrat.

Given the legal obligations to support OT's, Montserrat has a priority claim on DfID's £12 billion plus development aid budget. According to the 2002 UK International Development Act, we must not be put in competition with very poor third world countries. The key projects we are proposing are transformative and -- with timely and adequate support -- will help to get Montserrat out of dependency on annual grants from the UK.

It is definitely good news that, apart from having discussions with us year after year over budget support, GoM, FCO and DfID are now also discussing the first long-term capital programme with many projects. This will not only help to set Montserrat on a course out of dependency on the British tax payers but will fulfill the UK's obligations

under the United Nations Charter, Article 73, by ensuring our advancement, economically, socially, educationally and even politically while also promoting constructive measures of development.

That is why I shall continue to call on HMG to honour the UK's policies which are very supportive and allows them to do what is right by the people of Montserrat while doing what is in the interest of the British tax payers.

So 2019 is indeed the time for UK policy and action to match.

2019 is also the time for us as a people to be assertive about our rights as British Nationals under the UN Charter. Those who refuse to accept this and who sometimes even laugh at it are unintentionally working against Montserrat's interests. That must now stop and we must come together to move forward with a united force.

Finally, the key strategic move for 2019 and beyond is to turn our breakthroughs into a breakout that moves us beyond dependency and lingering impacts of the volcano disaster to resilient, self-sustaining, inclusive growth and development. With key infrastructure and projects coming in place, 2019 is the year for us to all work together to continue to attract the right kinds of support. This includes local and foreign investments and business that will build a modern, thriving, diverse, resilient, and lasting economy. One, in which all of our people, whether citizens, residents, visitors or friends, young and old -- ***through enterprise and initiative -- can fulfil their hopes in a truly democratic and God-fearing society***

Let us therefore continue to commit 2019 into God's hands and seek his wisdom as we work together to build our future.

God bless the People and Government of Montserrat in this year of our Lord, 2019.  
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