

BE PATIENT, GRENADA

FINANCE MINISTER SAYS THERE IS NO 'GANG OF FOUR';

Michael Bascombe

St. George's, Grenada, February 21, 2010 — Grenada's Finance Minister and deputy leader of the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) has dismissed newspaper reports suggesting that the government is seriously divided.

Hon. Nazim Burke said it's normal for organisations — including governments — to have 'differences of opinions on several issues,' but he refused to 'exaggerate the problem or make it any more than it is.' Sowing the seeds of 'discord and division,' he said, is not helpful to the NDC, the government or the country.

'What we need really at a time like this is a united government,' he said. 'Nothing that we say that divides the country can help us at this time.' Mr. Burke made the remarks when asked to comment on allegations in the February 19 edition The New Today newspaper that 'there are elements in the cabinet who are bent on destabilising the government for their own selfish gains.'

The allegations were contained in a lengthy commentary published on the newspaper's letters page. The so-called 'elements in the cabinet' were described by the writer as the 'Gang of Four.'

In its editorial, The New Today said it received the letter from 'someone with close ties to the ruling National Democratic Congress government of Prime Minister, Tillman Thomas.'

However, Mr. Burke said he does not think there is anything like a 'Gang of Four' in the cabinet. 'I do not subscribe to the Gang of Four theory. I would not like to refer to any members of the cabinet as a gang,' The Finance Minister said Sunday during an interview with local broadcaster, George Grant.

He added that 'if what is being suggested is that you have people within the cabinet who do not always agree on all issues, then that is true. That happens in every organisation.'

The Finance Minister believes that all current government ministers want to remain in cabinet. "I don't think that what we are facing is a situation where members do not want to serve under Prime Minister Thomas. That is not my sense," he said.

While there will be disagreements, said Mr. Burke, "how we deal with those disagreements really ultimately comes to the maturity of cabinet members themselves and the leadership of the Prime Minister."

Mr. Burke expressed surprise when asked about rumours that some cabinet members were deliberately "blocking" attempts to lay charges and prosecute former members of the New National Party administration on allegations of corruption.

"I have never heard it alleged that there is anybody in the cabinet who does not want prosecution," said Mr. Burke. "I don't think there will be anybody in the cabinet who can stop prosecution if there is going to be prosecution. I don't have any reason to think that there is anybody in the cabinet who is opposed to prosecution."

The Finance Minister said various investigations are ongoing and, in one instance, the probe is "well-advanced." He said investigations require time and urged "patience" from the Grenadian public. "We are working with a forensic accountant who has gathered a significant amount information for us," Mr. Burke revealed. "The police are involved, the DPP is involved, the Financial Intelligence Unit is involved. Investigations are ongoing, I can assure. I'm asking you to take my word."