

# CROSSTALK



**FEATURED ARTICLE:**

**NEW DIRECTIONS  
IN PARLIAMENT**

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# Foreword

**“Educate and inform the whole mass of the people...they are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty.”**

*Thomas Jefferson*

This quote by Thomas Jefferson brings to the fore the importance of educating and encouraging citizens, in a democracy, to assume a more active role in the parliamentary process.

This inaugural issue of “CrossTalk” aims at taking up this challenge to keep “the whole mass of the people” informed, and is the culmination of several months of planning and pruning undertaken by the Editorial Team at the Office of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

The name “CrossTalk” was chosen because it implies continued dialogue, even when the views are opposing ones, and it reflects the witty exchanges and repartee that are typical of what transpires in the Parliament Chamber.

“CrossTalk” therefore seeks to give the reader greater understanding of what takes place in the Parliament Chamber and to explain how these proceedings are relevant to our daily affairs; in business, work and family life.

But more than that, CrossTalk is seeking to build interest and interaction. We have witnessed how members of the public when touring the Chamber become completely immersed in the “Parliament experience” and by the time the tour is about to finish, they have a plethora of questions to ask.

We firmly believe that this interest by the public is engendered as a direct result of having had the opportunity to feel as though they were part of the democratic process and by the reminder that what takes place in the Parliament Chamber is aimed at improving the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is the hope that this magazine would achieve the same effect in the mind of the reader.

Thomas Jefferson, one of the founding fathers of the Independent United States of America, recognized the importance of educating the masses in building a great nation. Indeed it is worth considering for Trinidad and Tobago.

We continue to seek new and innovative ways to educate those within our reach.

Editorial Team  
CrossTalk Magazine





## NEW DIRECTIONS IN PARLIAMENT

**If you were asked to define the role and function of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, what would your answer be? Do you consider yourself a bystander simply watching national events unfold or do you believe that as a citizen, you have an active role to play in the parliamentary process?**

Given the rapidly changing nature of society and the immediacy of new communication technologies, it is important that Parliaments adopt new strategies that permit stakeholders to follow parliamentary affairs and which facilitate greater citizen participation in the decision making process.

While Parliament is the sole body responsible for making the laws that govern the country, it is also charged with representing the interests of citizens and of holding the Executive to account in matters of governance and public affairs.

Faced with growing public expectations regarding transparency and accountability in such affairs, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has had to review some of its policies to be able to respond strategically and effectively to the needs of the people it represents.

## Transparency and Accountability

Over the past year, the Parliament has been quietly pursuing a series of initiatives aimed at strengthening the institution of Parliament. One such effort has been the two-year collaboration with the European Union, which focuses on greater scrutiny in the budgetary process and Parliamentary oversight in the administration of government departments.

*“In a well-functioning parliamentary system, an efficient legislative process implies a strong role for parliamentary committees (Joint Select and Public Accounts Committees.) Their power and ability to influence policies are reflected through their active role in all aspects of parliamentary activity”.<sup>1</sup>*

It is therefore critical that these bodies are provided with the necessary human and administrative resources for the effective discharge of their duties. It is expected that the EU project will be completed in 2014.

The Parliament has also entered into a Joint Venture Project with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for the successful delivery of five (5) initiatives aimed at capacity strengthening.

## Responsive to the needs of the electorate

According to the Global Parliamentary Report: The Changing Nature of Parliamentary Representation,

*“greater emphasis on public engagement has come about for a number of reasons. In many cases, it has been in response to political crisis, low levels of public trust or a shift in political power within parliament. But, at a deeper level, the shift reflects the changing political landscape within which parliaments operate”.<sup>2</sup>*

Since 2006, parliamentary proceedings in Trinidad and Tobago have been televised LIVE, affording

citizens the opportunity to follow the debate of Bills and other important parliamentary matters. While the unpredictable length of sittings may pose challenges for viewers to follow on a regular basis, it is envisioned that soon there will be changes in the length and format of debates. For sure, the Standing Orders of both the House of Representatives and the Senate are in need of revision. These rules were first implemented in 1961 when our legislature adopted the bi-cameral system of governance. However some of these practices are now woefully out of date and impractical to the efficient and effective operations of Parliament.

Some of the proposals that could be considered:

- reduction of the speaking time allotted to MPs- from the current 45 minutes plus a possible 30-minute extension to 35 minutes with a possible 10-minute extension;
- reduction in the length of time in which questions qualify for oral answer (at present government MPs are allowed 21 days in which to respond); and
- introduction of a Prime Minister’s “Question Time” which would see the Prime Minister responding to questions raised by Opposition MPs on any matter or subject.

## Public Outreach

Parliament has always been an advocate of dialogue and inclusiveness. One of its strategic objectives has been a public outreach initiative, specifically designed to increase popular understanding and appreciation of the role of the institution.

These include specific programmes notably “Youth Connect” which was aired on the Parliament Channel in June 2012 and which targeted 4th to 6th form students.

*continued on the next page*

The “Parliament Caravan” is another outreach project where urban and rural communities are visited by staff of the Office of Parliament to inform them about the democratic and parliamentary processes.

School and public tours of the Parliament Chamber are other avenues open to citizens to learn more about the institution of Parliament.

Actual viewings of sittings are also actively encouraged.

It is critical that Parliament find new ways of engaging and communicating with the public, particularly among the youth and civil society, as this can lead to these groups becoming more empowered and able to participate in the legislative process. Throughout 2013, outreach initiatives will continue to form an integral part of the Parliament’s communication strategies.

### ICT initiatives

The prevalence of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) has also afforded Parliament the opportunity to utilize technology to improve its effectiveness in the complex parliamentary environment.

In the move to become a more eco-friendly institution, the Parliament has taken steps to significantly reduce its use of paper by requesting all its stakeholders to submit papers and other documents in e-form. Members of Parliament receive most of their parliamentary papers in soft copy, and earlier this year, Members began accessing documents from their iPads during sittings.

The introduction of these two measures will result in significant savings and efficiency gains for the institution.

### New Management Structure

Undoubtedly one of the more wide-reaching proposals advocates a new corporate structure for the Office of the Parliament. In this structure, the Office of Parliament will remain an organ of the State, but will now have an independent Board of Directors and Management Committee, giving it the latitude to function as an autonomous body.

It must be noted that changes to the existing management structure cannot be achieved overnight as it would require that the appropriate legislation be drafted, debated and eventually passed by both Houses of Parliament.

Whether by choice or by design, Parliaments must continuously examine and re-define their roles and, where applicable, adapt to the changing needs of their societies.

*“The growth in the size of government has increased the responsibilities of Parliaments to scrutinize and call to account. The development of communication technology and saturation media coverage of politics have increased the visibility of Parliaments and politicians. The expansion in the number of Parliaments around the world has been accompanied by increased public expectation of what they can and should deliver”.<sup>3</sup>*

Therefore for the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago to be truly representative, transparent, accountable, accessible and effective to the electorate, it must take steps to ensure it remains a



more relevant and modern twenty first century institution.

*Sources*

1 *“The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago: A study on Parliamentary Scrutiny and existing Parliamentary Practice © 2012”*

2 *“The Global Parliamentary Report, The Changing Nature of Parliamentary Representation ©2012”*

3 *“The Global Parliamentary Report, The Changing Nature of Parliamentary Representation ©2012”*







*Photos courtesy the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management*

When a natural disaster strikes, quite often, many persons are unprepared. Last August, Trinidad experienced one of the worst flooding disasters since the 90s. The destruction of properties and loss of personal possessions caused many families to be displaced and left many with the huge burden of removing debris and sludge from roads and homes. Depending on the extent of damage to property and infrastructure, Government may step in to provide relief to citizens. Through partnership with several state agencies, the Government attempts to bring some measure of normalcy to the situation.

One of the agencies that constituents can visit for assistance is the National Commission for Self-Help Limited (NCSHL). The NCSHL partners with the Ministry of the People and Social Development to help constituents to obtain grants for the purchase of necessities. Speaking with CrossTalk, Mintra Balchand, a regional coordinator at the

Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management (ODPM) said, "The ODPM partners with many state agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) such as the Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Works, Ministry of the People and Social Development, Red Cross, Rotary International and Lions before, during and after an incident. Even after an emergency, the constituent may lodge a complaint with the Disaster Management Unit (DMU) of their respective regional corporation. Balchand added, "that a representative from the NCSHL may also assist them in filling out the relevant application forms. The DMU will then send a field officer to visit the area in order to determine the extent of the damages."

Following on this process, the case is then transferred to the Ministry of the People and Social Development. If a constituent has lost their





home, they are first asked to seek shelter at the home of a relative or close friend. If they are unable to do so and need to seek alternative shelter, they can call the ODPM's customer care contact centre at 511 to determine the nearest temporary emergency shelter. For more long term solutions, the Housing Development Corporation may also step in to offer assistance. For further information or assistance, affected citizens can call the NCSHL at 627-9519 or visit the office at #75 Abercromby Street, Port-of-Spain.

Although these state agencies are here to assist in times of disaster, the saying "prevention is better than cure" would serve citizens well in the long run. You can use the time leading up to the rainy season to ensure that any drains and rivers in your neighbourhood remain clear of debris and overgrown grass. Contact your local regional corporation to have such work done in advance as they are usually the first responders in the event of a natural disaster.



# CONSTITUENCY HIGHLIGHTS

## ARIMA

Rodger Samuel has been the elected representative for Arima since May 24, 2010. In addition to his constituency duties, he is also the Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister. As the Member of Parliament for the area, Mr. Samuel's main thrust of activities for the Borough of Arima are focused on preserving the environment, improving infrastructure, providing more social services to constituents and ensuring that young people take advantage of all the opportunities that exist for advancement.

Based on statistics cited in the "2011 Population and Housing Census Preliminary Count", published by the Central Statistical Office, the total population of Arima stands at 33,807 persons consisting of 16,671 males and 17,136 females.

The word "Arima" comes from the Amerindian word meaning "water" as the village was formed on the banks of the Arima River. The area was founded in 1757 by Capuchin priests from Spain who had come to convert the Amerindians to Christianity, and who later built a church and established a mission in the area. The church was then dedicated to Rosa, an Amerindian girl from Lima, Peru, who had just been canonized as Santa Rosa de Lima. On the 1st August 1888, Arima was granted the status of a Royal Borough making it

the first and only town in the British colonies at that time. A borough refers to a geographical area which is administered by Local Government.

The church of Santa Rosa de Lima still stands on the original site. Every year, in the week leading up to Independence Day, the Santa Rosa feast is celebrated as an "Amerindian" festival. The festival pays tribute to the First Peoples of the New World and seeks to expose their culture to a wider cross-section of the country. Ceremonies include the crowning of the Carib Queen, an elder matron of their community who performs the role of preserving their heritage and traditions, a church procession and performance of some of their traditional and ritual activities.

Prominent people in Trinidad and Tobago have emerged from Arima, including the late Aldwyn Roberts, better known as the calypsonian Lord Kitchener, and Holly Betaudier or "Holly B" as he is fondly called.

The Arima Constituency Office is located at #3 Robinson Circular, Arima. The office hours are Monday to Friday- 8am to 4pm.

Tel: 667-3289 Fax: 667-4245

Email address: arimamp@gmail.com

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/arimamp.samuel>

Tuesdays are designated for the MP to meet with constituents to discuss any concerns which they may have. The system is usually on a "first come, first serve" basis and runs from 9am until.



## Factoid:

*"In 1898 Mayor John Francis Wallen presented the people of Arima with a clock purchased in Nice, France. The chimes of the clock were said to give the people of Arima a sense of time, particularly at the start of a new day. No longer chiming, the Dial is known nowadays more as a landmark than a timepiece."*

Source:

<http://citizensforconservationtt.org/main/index.php/builtherit/builtcolonial/113-arima-dial>

*Photo courtesy the Office of the Mayor, Arima Borough Corporation*





# OUR REGION, OUR PARLIAMENTS

The Caribbean is a diverse geographical and political region spanning the islands of Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico in the north, and the Leeward Islands starting with the U.S. Virgin Islands in the north and ending with Trinidad and Tobago in the south. While most of the islands which were former British colonies, follow the Westminster democratic parliamentary style of government, there are some islands notably Cuba which follow a different system of governance. For example, although it is a socialist state, Cuba has a Parliament, known as the National Assembly of People's Power.

In this inaugural issue of CrossTalk we begin a series highlighting basic facts on the various legislatures in the Caribbean region. In the spotlight are the Parliaments of Barbados and Grenada where national/ general elections were recently held.



## Barbados' Parliament

Barbados is considered one of the oldest constitutions in the Commonwealth and is regarded as a parliamentary democracy headed by her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The Queen's

representative on the island is the Governor General.

Since 1840, Barbados has had a representative form of government, based on a unicameral Parliament, completely under the domination of the island's planter-class. This form of representation was replaced by a bi-cameral system of governance based on universal adult suffrage in 1951. The Parliament of Barbados, as we know it today, was first introduced after the general elections in 1961. Five years later, Barbados would attain independence from Great Britain.

Following the 2013 General Elections held on the 21st February, the ruling Democratic Labour Party retained power, winning 16 of the 30 seats in the House of Assembly. The Honourable Freundel J. Stuart was returned as Prime Minister while the Barbados Labour Party (BLP) appointed Miss Mia Mottley, Q.C, MP, as the new leader of the party and Leader of the Opposition.

The Senate comprises twenty-one (21) appointed members; twelve (12) members appointed by the Prime Minister, seven (7) by the Governor General at his discretion to represent various interests in the community such as religious, economic, social or other such interests and two (2) by the Leader of Opposition. The House of Assembly (the equivalent of our House of Representatives), consists of thirty (30) MPs, including the Speaker of the House, who are all elected via the "first past-the-post" system. The House of Assembly usually meets on Tuesdays, but if there is urgent business a sitting can be



called on any other day. The Senate usually sits on Wednesdays.



For many years, during its early history Grenada was colonised by the French and then the British. As such, traces of the European influence are very much evident in the island's culture, architecture and place names. The State of Grenada consists of three islands; Grenada, Carriacou and Petite Martinique which form the southern chain of the Windward Islands. The capital, St. George's, is located on the south west coast of Grenada and is the seat of government and the main commercial centre. On attaining independence in 1974, Grenada became a constitutional monarchy with a Prime Minister and Queen Elizabeth II as Head of State represented by the Governor General.

The Grenada Parliament is a bi-cameral legislature, comprising the Senate and the House of Representatives. On Monday 19th February 2013, the New National Party unseated the National Democratic Congress winning by a landslide and obtaining all fifteen (15) seats. Dr. Keith Mitchell became the country's ninth Prime Minister, however the office is not new to him, having previously served as Prime Minister between 1995 and 2008. The Senate consists of

thirteen (13) non-elected members; seven (7) are appointed by the Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister, three (3) on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition and three (3) on the advice of the Prime Minister after he/she has consulted the organisations or interests from which he/she considers the Senators would be selected to represent. Conversely, the House of Representatives comprises fifteen (15) elected members. The powers of the Senate and the House of Representatives are constitutionally equal except that financial legislation cannot be introduced in the Senate. The House of Representatives has the more predominant role in the parliamentary system and is also considered as the focal point of parliamentary activity and public attention, where major national and international issues are debated.

**For additional information you can access the websites of**

**The Parliament of Barbados**  
[www.barbadosparliament.com](http://www.barbadosparliament.com)

**The Parliament of Grenada**  
[www.gov.gd](http://www.gov.gd)





# COMMONWEALTH DAY 2013

Commonwealth Day is regarded as an opportunity to highlight global issues and the various ways in which Commonwealth organisations through international co-operation work to improve the lives of citizens. Each year, the day is observed on the second Monday in March.

Under this year's theme of "Opportunity through Enterprise", the Executive Committee of the Trinidad and Tobago Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association hosted an exhibition and seminar which saw over 50 secondary school students from across the country in attendance.

The event was hosted on Tuesday 12 March 2013 at the Office of the Parliament, Tower D, at the Port of Spain International Waterfront Centre, Wrightson Road, Port of Spain.

Speaker of the House and Chairman of the Executive Committee, the Honourable Wade Mark, MP, addressed students, encouraging them to be vigilant in their pursuit of success but never to lose sight of how they can improve society from both a national and international perspective.

Reinforcing the Speaker's advice, was President of the Senate (Vice Chairman of the Executive Committee), Senator the Honourable Timothy Hamel-Smith, who challenged the students to be innovators who are unafraid to engage in non-traditional job opportunities and entrepreneurial activities.

Representatives from several financial and business organisations, including the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited and the Trinidad and Tobago Stock Exchange gave presentations and hosted booths which provided information to the students on saving and investing money, as well as on procedures for establishing and managing their own businesses.

The students and teachers also received a surprise visit from the President (then President Elect) of Trinidad and Tobago, His Excellency Anthony Carmona, who warmly greeted them all.

The students ended their day with a tour of the Parliament Chamber.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

27th May - 1st June 2013

24th Commonwealth Parliamentary  
Seminar, Singapore

Theme: ***“Strengthening  
Parliamentary Democracy”***.

The seminar is being organized by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in conjunction with the Parliament of Singapore. It is intended to be an intensive learning exercise in parliamentary matters and is focused on developing the professional skills of newly elected Parliamentarians. Some of the topics which will be discussed by participants include:

- The Commonwealth and the Role of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
- Introduction to the Singapore Parliamentary System
- The Role of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker
- Role of an MP and Parliamentary Ethics
- Innovations to Standing Orders and Parliamentary Practices
- Scrutiny of the Executive: Public Accounts Committee
- Challenges facing Women in Politics and Parliament

The Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is expected to send a delegation to the conference.



## So, You Want to Visit the Parliament?

Have you ever found yourself wondering what it would be like to actually be in the place where important decisions that affect all of Trinidad and Tobago are made? Or are you one of those who mistakenly believe that seeing the Parliament Chamber in person is a right only reserved for a select few?

Every week, the Corporate Communications Department (CCD), receives requests from schools, church and community groups, foreign delegations and individuals, eager to be given a tour of the Parliament Chamber and to get the chance to walk among the “hallowed chamber halls”. Unfortunately, it is during these interactions with members of the public that we are consistently reminded that there are still many people in Trinidad and Tobago who are unaware that they can attend a sitting of either the House of Representatives or the Senate as well as request a tour of the Chamber.

Organizing a visit to the Parliament is not rocket science but there are some guidelines that you would need to know, (see page 16).

## Here's How the Process Goes

### Planning the visit:

- Send a request in writing to the Office of the Clerk of the House or contact the Corporate Communications Department (CCD) at 624-7275 ext 2520 or 2275 indicating the date you wish to visit the Chamber at least one week in advance of the date of your intended visit. The CCD, after consultation with the Marshal of the Parliament, will then contact you to confirm whether your request has been approved or denied for that particular date.
- Once your request has been approved, an official letter of confirmation will be sent to you. If not, the CCD will then liaise with you to find an alternative date.

### Coming to the Chamber on the Day:

- Groups should not exceed forty (40) persons. In the case of schools or youth groups, students must be accompanied by 2 or 3 teachers and may visit the Chamber on non-sitting days. On sitting days, the group should not exceed thirty (30) persons.
- Liaise with the CCD to arrange parking as there are parking restrictions on the streets around the Parliament.
- Eating and drinking are not permitted in the Chamber at any time.
- Persons visiting Parliament are asked to dress appropriately.
- Jerseys/T-shirts, short pants (except in the case of students in uniform), track pants, sandals and slippers are NOT allowed.
- The following are not permitted in the Chamber during a sitting of the House or the Senate:

*Eating, Drinking; Loud laughter; Conversing; Applauding; Sleeping; Reading; Taking of photographs while the sitting is in progress; Walking about; Standing; Sitting backward; Smoking; Jeering; No audio or video recording [other than the authorised media]; Writing [other than at the Press table]; Use of cellular phones, pagers, or any other communication device that may disrupt the proceedings.*

We believe that educating citizens about the role and function of the Parliament is one of the most important responsibilities of the Office of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. If you understand and appreciate the workings and the role of Parliament, you

may be more likely to participate and be engaged in the democratic system. This is why we welcome all interested persons and organizations to have a first-hand opportunity to see our Democracy at work.

**The only thing needed, is for you to start the process.**

For more details on visiting the Parliament, please check the following link on our website:

<http://www.ttparliament.org/about.php?mid=65>

# CROSSTALK

**We welcome your comments and suggestions:**

**Email CrossTalk feedback to:**  
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