

**OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
TRINIDAD
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

**Address to the Nation by
His Excellency Senator the Honourable Timothy Hamel-Smith,
Acting President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago,
on the occasion of Republic Day 2011.**

“Transforming T&T: Being part of the Solution”

Fellow Citizens, tonight I address you in extraordinary circumstances. Today Trinidad and Tobago stands at the cross-roads of history. Will we continue to spiral downwards into chaos? Or will we begin to forge a new national destiny for ourselves, our children and grandchildren?

The very crisis that we face presents us with the opportunity for fundamental change. It challenges us to make a profound cultural shift in our attitudes, behaviors and values on the journey to true Nationhood.

As a nation we can either decide that it will be business as usual once the moment has passed. Or, we can go after our dream, our vision for Trinidad and Tobago as expressed in our Nation’s motto: “Together we Aspire, Together we Achieve”.

I remember well the sense of pride we shared as Trinidad and Tobago approached Independence. I was fourteen years old at the time. We all believed then there was nothing that we could not achieve as a nation. We were to be the masters of our own destiny. Ours was the awesome responsibility to translate that vision into reality.

A vision in which no one is left behind. A vision in which each individual is given the opportunity to fulfill the unique potential with which she or he has been endowed by Almighty God.

This will require each one of us to strive to achieve our full potential in every sphere of life – to move from good to great – from mediocrity to excellence and from excellence to stellar performance in the world of Nations through the pursuit of our National watchwords “Discipline, Tolerance and Production”.

During this period I sense that as a people we have started to exercise far greater restraint and discipline. I am also fully aware of the sacrifices which many of you have made and

continue to make during this State of Emergency. For me, such actions send the signal that we can succeed in our quest for Nationhood.

I would therefore like to share with you tonight some thoughts on how we may deepen this process and ensure that we succeed on this journey that we have embarked upon.

The Vision

Let us picture for a moment what each of us would like Trinidad and Tobago to look like. For me, achieving this vision will create for us a place and a Society:

- Where Peace and Justice prevail. Imagine walking our beautiful land without fear. Imagine a land in which each person is fairly treated and is given a real opportunity to succeed. Imagine a Country where we build up one another – understanding that we are our brother’s and sister’s keeper. Where we welcome and celebrate our diversity, recognizing that discrimination against one is discrimination against all.
- A Society where Service and Productivity predominate. Where each of us benefits from courteous and SUPER service. Imagine entering our places of business and government departments where we are always warmly welcomed and not treated as intruders. Imagine the great heights we would scale in Trinidad and Tobago if we quadrupled our productivity. Yes we have pockets of excellence but far, far too many of us are operating well below our potential.
- A Land Where We preserve, enhance and beautify our Environment. Imagine our supernaturally beautiful Land, recapturing its pristine glory – our mountains and forests gleaming and our streams, rivers and seas sparkling with brilliance; our roads, pathways and public spaces clean and beautified.

The Path

What will it take to translate our dream for Trinidad and Tobago into a reality? I believe it will require each Citizen to exercise Discipline, to promote Tolerance and Compassion across every sector of our Society and to seek to achieve optimum levels of Production.

While we all desire to experience this vision for Trinidad and Tobago we sometimes wonder if the task is beyond our capability. And so we might ask ourselves: “What can I do to make a difference? How can I be part of the solution?”. Or some of us may ask: “Is that not the job of the Government?”

I believe working together in harmony, we can achieve our dream. As a people we have the potential to succeed far beyond our wildest imaginations. We CAN transform this great land of ours. I believe that deep within the hearts of every Citizen is a desire for Trinidad and Tobago to succeed and to be an example of unity and harmony in our complex diversity, which is the central message which we can model for our World.

And so I propose to focus tonight on three areas of national concern where we as Citizens have the ability to influence the turnaround – to begin the journey of transforming Trinidad and Tobago.

First let us consider the issue of Peace and Justice

How can we create a Society where Peace and Justice prevail? I believe that as a Society we must come to understand, as the late Pope John Paul II has said, that if we want Peace then we must work for Justice.

This exhortation applies with particular reference to our Leaders, whether in Government, Opposition, Business, Labour, Religion, Media or Civil Society, indeed each of us whose actions and decisions touch the lives of others, including Parents and Teachers. So when I refer to Leaders I include all of these categories of leaders.

This will require that every Leader act fairly and justly. If our actions are to have an impact on a national scale then we must be mindful of the common good, so that Country comes before narrow self-interest. Employees are entitled to be paid a just and fair wage for their services. All promotions must be based on merit. Fair and transparent procurement practices must be adopted in the award of contracts, while retaining effectiveness and efficiency.

Further, we must move from our crabs in a barrel attitude, in which we excel at tearing down each other. By such actions we tear at the fabric of our Society and endanger the peace of our Land. We must learn to be critical and still act civilly, treating each other with dignity and respect.

In particular, our Leaders must find alternative ways of settling their differences without descending into reckless and divisive rhetoric - To seek to achieve consensus wherever the national interest is at stake. It is therefore the sacred duty of us as Leaders to mirror the behaviors which we want to see replicated in our Society.

Justice requires in particular that special arrangements are made for the disadvantaged and the oppressed in our Land. Not arrangements in which we ensnare them into a lifetime of servitude, without hope of moving up the ladder of success. But rather, through training and education, each person must have a fair opportunity to achieve a decent standard of living by his own hard work and personal effort.

But the transformation of T&T cannot be accomplished by our Leaders alone. It requires each of us as individuals, to exercise the virtue of discipline.

Let us now turn to those of us who proclaim to be the average law-abiding citizen. We each need to ask ourselves: “Am I guilty of lawless and undisciplined behaviour? Do I drive while under the influence of alcohol? Do I break red lights? Do I wear my seatbelt and ensure that my passengers do the same? Do I speed on the roadways? Am I guilty of reckless driving? Do I drive on the shoulder of the road? Do I use my cell phone while driving?”

Why do I choose to focus on our driving behaviours? Our roadways are the most visible public spaces in which indiscipline and lawlessness prevail, and the resulting chaos is the ideal environment for crime of every variety to flourish. And because we are all guilty of creating this environment of indiscipline and lawlessness, we have the power to change the game, while saving lives and stamping out the carnage on our roads.

To achieve this objective each and every one of us will have to exercise discipline on our roads. I am convinced that if tomorrow morning a critical mass of citizens starts exercising discipline by obeying our road traffic laws, such collective action will serve as the tipping point for the transformation of our Society. The ugly spectre of crime which now looms large will recede and no longer have a stranglehold on our lives.

But no matter the level of discipline which we attain, there will always be need for enforcement of our laws if we are to achieve Peace in our Society. Although I do not condone for one moment any misuse of power, I draw great comfort from the sense of enthusiasm which the Police Service has displayed in carrying out their duties during the State of Emergency. I urge them to continue to act effectively and decisively but always within lawful limits. Let us not put at risk the tangible benefits which the State of Emergency can help to deliver.

It is my fervent hope that the Police will continue to demonstrate this willingness and enthusiasm for tackling lawlessness on our roadways, and all other criminal activity, even after the State of Emergency.

Secondly let us turn to the question of Service and Productivity

I believe that our Citizens have enormous untapped creative potential. Many of our Citizens have received world recognition in different fields of endeavour. In our Energy Industry, our Citizens are outstanding performers in world class mega energy based plants and productivity and safety standards surpass international bench marks. The inventiveness, energy and industry displayed in our steel band movement serves as a beacon around the world for what can be achieved by a grassroots movement. We have an extraordinary amount of raw talent across a wide spectrum of cultures which could make us the regional leaders in the entertainment industry. Yet, in too many other areas we appear to strive for mediocrity.

Our people are famed for their hospitality. On the one hand we can allow this virtue to descend into bacchanalian behaviour or we can establish a world ranking tourism and entertainment industry, providing jobs and opportunities for entrepreneurial activity. If we could only replicate the type of hard work and industry displayed by our outstanding performances in every sphere of national activity, Trinidad and Tobago would find itself at the top of the class.

What is it about our national psyche that prevents a critical mass of our People striving for success? Have we lost the vision of our founding fathers when we first became independent? Has the abundance of oil and gas wealth ruined our appetite for sacrifice and hard work? Have we become a dependent people looking for handouts? Have we lost the sense of industry and entrepreneurship reflected in the steel band movement? Are we

waiting for someone else to do the work of national development for us? Is it that we feel cheated by history and therefore harbour a sense of entitlement?

Fellow Citizens, we have to wake up to the truth that the turnaround of our Country is solely up to us, the 1.3 million people who inhabit these islands of Trinidad and Tobago. It is our own resourcefulness and effort which will get us to the next level. There is no magic wand.

If we fail to seize the opportunity now presented to us to make a fundamental change in how we approach life, in the way we serve each other, in excelling in our jobs, in being more productive, in finding creative ways to ensure that there are no stumbling blocks to achieving our goals, we will be doomed to remain at the lowest rungs in the ladder of Nations.

Let us do it for ourselves, our Nation, our children and our grandchildren. We owe it to posterity to make the change now. The time is short. It will be a very long time again before an opportunity such as this presents itself to us. We must awaken from our slumber and remember the vision our founding fathers set for us when they included Production as an integral element of the watchwords of the Nation.

Thirdly and finally let us consider our Environment

How we maintain our surroundings tells us so much about ourselves and who we are as a Nation. The garbage we strew across our public spaces suggests that we have no sense of belonging to this place we call Trinidad and Tobago. It is imperative that we come to realise that Trinidad and Tobago is our home and deserves the love and respect of patriotic citizens.

Moreover, taking care of our environment implies not only an absence of garbage and degradation of our Environment, but the taking of positive steps towards enhancing those areas of our Environment which we use.

A personal story which remains embedded in my mind may help to illustrate this point. Some years ago I was on a beach in one of our neighbouring Caribbean islands when a young man inquired whether my family would like to swim with the turtles. My family and I went on the boat trip with him further down the coast in his small fishing boat and had a wonderful time swimming with the turtles. On our return journey the young man suddenly stopped the boat, turned around, collected a plastic bottle floating in the sea, placed it in his boat and then continued back to our destination.

What is the significance of this story? Here was a young man with pride in his Country:

First, he saw a problem – a plastic bottle destined to end up on the beaches. He understood that one plastic bottle could turn into thousands resulting in the death of tourism and his source of income.

Secondly, he owned the problem. He did not consider it was the Government's problem to clean up the beaches.

Thirdly, he determined what was the appropriate action which would solve the problem; and

Fourthly, he took action to solve the problem by picking up the plastic bottle so that it could be disposed of in a proper manner.

Imagine what Trinidad and Tobago, indeed all of our business, social and government operations, would be like if each of our Citizens adopted such an attitude to the problems which occur within his or her sphere of activity and took action to solve the problem. That my fellow Citizens is the attitude which would take our Country from good to great and ultimately catapult us to the top of world rankings.

We have been blessed with fertile lands and flowering trees and shrubs of very many colours and shapes which bloom in this tropical wonderland of diverse cultures and races. I believe that our sense of pride in our Nation would begin to take root if our public spaces were all beautifully landscaped to capture the wonder of nature. But that implies that it is our responsibility to take exceptional care of our public spaces.

It cannot be that we proclaim “I love my Country” while throwing a fast food box out of the window of our car. Nor can we litter our rivers, streams and beaches with plastic bottles, appliances and other garbage and expect that these actions will not come back to haunt us in the form of floods. Indeed the lawlessness which this represents also creates an environment in which crime flourishes. These seemingly mindless acts of indiscipline can have devastating consequences.

We the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago must each take responsibility for our actions where garbage disposal is concerned and I urge each of you to go further and to start to beautify your surroundings – the small steps which each of us take can be the ‘Power of One’ to make a dramatic change in our landscape with a resurgence of pride in our Country.

As I move to Conclude

I acknowledge that the above suggestions do not pretend to be everything to be said on the subject. Trinbagonians that we are, I have no doubt you will, with the right encouragement, have far more creative ideas than I could ever have as to how, together, we can work for the transformation of our beloved Trinidad and Tobago.

Understand well, fellow Citizens, this opportunity which now presents itself to transform Trinidad and Tobago is very unlikely to repeat itself. It is absolutely imperative that we seize the moment. We have no time to lose. Each of us must take such steps as we can to make a difference:

- By treating each other fairly, justly and with dignity and respect so that Peace can flow

- By driving courteously on our roadways and instilling a sense of Discipline in our Society
- By striving for excellence in our every endeavour so that collectively we achieve optimum levels of production
- By beautifying our surroundings so that we can take pride in our Country

As we reflect on this, the 35th Anniversary of our Nation's becoming a Republic, I ask each of you today, at this very moment, to commit yourselves to rekindling the vision of our Founding Fathers so that together we can translate this vision for Trinidad and Tobago into reality. Make no mistake about it, the very soul of our Nation is at stake!

The good news is that by implementing our National watchwords of Discipline, Tolerance and Production, the transformation of Trinidad and Tobago is within our grasp. But we must seize the moment! As one Nation and one People, we **MUST** change our attitudes and behaviors and hold fast to our Values.

At this dark hour, each of our small lights of brilliance when added together, will illuminate our Country and achieve for our Nation our potential for greatness.

May Almighty God richly bless each one of you; and

May God Bless our Nation!