

**Welcome Remarks of the Honourable Wade Mark, MP
Speaker of the House
Official Opening Ceremony – Conference of Commonwealth
Speakers & Presiding Officers
Monday January 09, 2012 at 09.00**

Our distinguished guests - His Excellency Professor George Maxwell Richards,

The Honourable Acting Prime Minister, Winston Dookeran,

The Honourable Justice, Ivor Archie, Chief Justice,

Senator the Honourable Timothy Hamel Smith, President of the Senate,

Esteemed fellow presiding officers of the Commonwealth,

Members of Cabinet,

Ambassadors, High Commissioners and other members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Honourable Dr. Keith Rowley, MP – Leader of the Opposition

Members of Parliament,

The Right Honourable Sir Alan Haselhurst, MP – Chairperson of the CPA, Executive Committee and other CPA officials,

Secretaries General and Clerks of Parliament,

Distinguished guests and visitors,

Members of the media,

Ladies and gentlemen

It is indeed my pleasure to welcome you, the delegates of the 21st Conference of Commonwealth Speakers and Presiding Officers (CSPOC) to Trinidad & Tobago for the second time in fourteen years. This period bears special significance for the citizens and the Members of Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. We marked fifty years of bicameralism last November and will commence golden jubilee independence celebrations in August.

We are grateful that you are here to share these milestones with us, and envisage that our deliberations here will contribute to the important global dialogue on the role and relevance of Parliamentary democracy in these tumultuous times - times that are simultaneously framed by the hope of new promise but tempered by the despair of new perils.

I chair this conference at a time when marginalized and disaffected citizens throughout the world are re-scripting conventional notions of democracy, aided in no small part by

the increased access to the new communication technologies. At the same time that these new models are emerging, economic decline, fragile security and the widening chasm between the 'haves and have nots' are threatening the stability of the most well established democracies.

The 21st installation of the CSPOC is taking place at a time when the responsibility of global citizenship binds us together more than any other time in our history. Given this fact, the conference will address some of the more pressing issues facing those of us who are called upon to promote and protect parliamentary democracy in its various forms. Over the next two days, the programme will address these global concerns and will hopefully also allow us to find new modalities to harness our collective energies in the service of building stronger, more relevant and inclusive democracies throughout the Commonwealth.

We have developed workshop topics that recognize the challenges of maintaining parliamentary democracy within global systems that consistently promote convergence between people, media, technology, ideas and finance – a convergence that can no longer be contained by the distance of an ocean or by the borders of a country. By recognizing these complex networks, we will discuss ways to develop true

partnerships that share solutions and take advantage of the opportunities inherent in these world systems.

We will also address the growing diversity among global citizens as evidenced by the increasing trend towards multiparty chambers and coalition governments. In this way, we hope to emphasize the unique role of presiding officers in ensuring that these diverse needs and interests are equally addressed.

All our deliberations are aimed at ensuring that we all clarify and re-affirm our roles in ensuring the core purpose and values of Parliamentary democracy, namely transparency and accountability, are never compromised. More importantly, I believe that we can all use this opportunity to renew our contract with the citizens we represent by keeping the flame of hope that is at the centre of all democratic principles accessible, active and alive.

As Conference Chair, I also want to ensure that you are exposed to the rich cultural and environmental landscape of my twin island state. As hosts, we invite you to enjoy the fine array of our cuisine, our infectious music, our island fashion, as well as the historical sites forged out of our colonial past. Some of

you will also visit the island of Tobago and we are sure you will enjoy its unique heritage and breathtaking beauty.

In closing, let me state that I look forward to your deliberations. It is my sincere hope that the conference encourages us all to re-commit to the important role of democracy in global development, and inspires us to hold fast to its ideals, ideals that are shared by humans the world over - the right to live free from fear and want, as well as the right to yearn for lives marked by dignity, opportunity, security and justice.

Once again, my heartfelt welcome. I thank you.