



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Debates of the House of Representatives

1st Session – 11th Parliament (Rep.) – Volume 1 – Number 1

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)**

THE HONOURABLE BRIDGID ANNISETTE-GEORGE
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE ESMOND FORDE
DEPUTY SPEAKER

Wednesday 23rd September, 2015

CLERK OF THE HOUSE: JACQUI SAMPSON-MEIGUEL

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CONTENTS

				Page
A PROCLAMATION	1
ELECTION OF SPEAKER	2
OATH OF ALLEGIANCE	2
ELECTION OF DEPUTY SPEAKER	...	...	...	2
AFFIRMATION OF ALLEGIANCE	...	...	...	3
OATH OF ALLEGIANCE	...	...	...	3
PRAYERS	...	...	...	4
PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS	...	...	...	4
PAPER LAID	...	...	...	15
ADJOURNMENT				
<i>[Hon. C. Robinson-Regis]</i>	...	...	...	15
CONDOLENCES				
(Errol Edward Mahabir)				
<i>[Madam Speaker]</i>	...	...	...	16
REPUBLIC DAY GREETINGS				
<i>[Madam Speaker]</i>	...	...	...	19
APPRECIATION				
<i>[Madam Speaker]</i>	...	...	...	22

**THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT
IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC
OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON SEPTEMBER 23, 2015**

SESSION 2015—2016

VOLUME 1

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, September 23, 2015

1.30 P.M.

The House of Representatives having assembled, and it being the first meeting of the First Session of the Eleventh Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Clerk of the House read the following Proclamation:

REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

No. 13 of 2015.

[L.S.]

By His Excellency ANTHONY THOMAS AQUINAS CARMONA,
O.R.T.T., S.C., President and Commander-in-Chief of the
Armed Forces of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

ANTHONY T. A. CARMONA

President

A PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS it is provided by subsection (1) of section 67 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, that each session of Parliament shall be held at such place within Trinidad and Tobago and shall commence at such time as the President may by Proclamation appoint:

Now, therefore, I, ANTHONY THOMAS AQUINAS CARMONA, President as aforesaid, do hereby appoint Tower D, Port of Spain International Waterfront Centre, 1A Wrightson Road, Port of Spain, Trinidad, as the place at which the First Session of the Eleventh Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago shall be held and 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday the 23rd day of September, 2015, as the time at which the said Session shall commence.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the
President of the Republic of Trinidad and

A Proclamation

Wednesday, September 23, 2015

Tobago, at the Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 14th day of September, 2015.

ELECTION OF SPEAKER

Clerk of the House: Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 4(1) of the House of Representatives, I now invite proposals for the Office of Speaker of the House.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Clerk, I propose that Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George do take the Chair of this House as Speaker.

Seconded by Dr. Roodal Moonilal.

There being no other nominations, the Clerk of the House declared Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George duly elected Speaker of the House of Representatives. [Applause]

Clerk of the House: I request the Marshal of the Parliament to escort the Speaker to the Chamber.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

ELECTION OF DEPUTY SPEAKER

Madam Speaker: May I invite the Chamber to be seated? Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 5(1) of the House of Representatives, I now invite proposals for the Office of Deputy Speaker of the House.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, I wish to propose that Mr. Esmond Forde do take the Chair of this House as Deputy Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I recognize the hon. Member, Ganga Singh.

Mr. Ganga Singh (Chaguanas West): Madam Speaker, congratulations and I beg to second the nomination.

There being no other nominations, the Speaker declared Mr. Esmond Forde duly elected Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives. [Applause]

Affirmation of Allegiance

Wednesday, September 23, 2015

AFFIRMATION OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Esmond Forde took and subscribed the Affirmation of Allegiance as required by law.

Madam Speaker: The Clerk shall now administer the oath or affirmation to each of the other Members of the honourable House. I would really now invite everyone to be seated.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

The following Members took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law:

Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis
 Dr. Keith Rowley
 Mr. Faris Al-Rawi
 Mr. Colm Imbert
 Miss Marlene Mc Donald
 Mr. Terrence Deyalsingh
 Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds
 Mr. Stuart Young
 Miss Shamfa Cudjoe
 Brig. Gen. Ancil Antoine
 Mrs. Cherrie-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn
 Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon
 Mr. Maxie Cuffie
 Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly
 Miss Nicole Olivierre
 Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy
 Mr. Anthony Garcia
 Mr. Darryl Smith
 Mr. Randall Mitchell
 Mr. Lovell Francis
 Mr. Adrian Leonce
 Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith

Dr. Roodal Moonilal
 Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC
 Dr. Tim Gopeesingh
 Mr. Prakash Ramadhar
 Mr. Fazal Karim
 Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan
 Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein
 Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie
 Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh
 Mr. David Lee
 Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh
 Miss Ramona Ramdial
 Mr. Ganga Singh
 Dr. Fuad Khan
 Mr. Rodney Charles
 Mr. Barry Padarath
 Dr. Lackram Bodoie
 Mr. Rushton Paray

PRAYERS

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago desires to address all Members of Parliament. This sitting is now suspended.

2.25 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.37 p.m.: *Members of the Senate arrived and took their places in the Chamber.*

3.10 p.m.: *His Excellency the President, accompanied by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, arrived in the Chamber.*

[INVOCATIONS]

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

His Excellency the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona, ORTT, SC., addressed both Houses of Parliament as follows:

Members of the Parliament, my fellow citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

After 29 years of republicanism, how do we, as a people, view our democracy? Democracy is not only a government of, for and by the people but a government for all of the people all of the time. This is what must be etched in your minds as Members of this hallowed Chamber as you begin the work of the people. This, I suggest, must be your mantra as servants of the people.

As we formally convene the Eleventh Parliament of our beloved Republic, I entreat you all who have taken the Oath of Office as parliamentarians, not to squander the opportunity bestowed on you by the people through the exercise of their votes. I implore you to represent them not only as legislators, but also as representatives who would not adopt the posture of the absentee landlords from our colonial past and only return to your constituents when you once more seek their suffrage at another election. You must not adopt the stance of being an absentee Member of Parliament in your constituency. You must remember always that you have assumed your privileged positions as trustees on behalf of the people, not as proprietors of estates in fee simple.

Successive Parliaments, in their stewardship, have passed laws for the order, good governance and the economic development of this land, and despite its imperfections and challenges, we are proud to call this Trinidad and Tobago our

home. Such affirmative pride is echoed by every citizen everywhere, from the man in Sangre Grande to the woman in Speyside and the young people in Brasso Seco.

Today Members and citizens, I am going to talk to your hearts, a much needed conversation with the soul of the nation. This is the essence of my intended dialogue. In each of our lives, we have different philosophies we live by but I wish to promote in real terms the philosophy of genuine service, the benefits of national pride, service to people, community, the nation and the world. What therefore is your philosophy as a parliamentarian? And this you must determine now at the start of your stewardship.

What new body of laws therefore would you, the Members of the Eleventh Parliament, bequeath to our future citizens? Would you use your lawmaking powers to enact legislation for the sustainable development of Trinidad and Tobago solely based on myopic or parochial considerations? Or would you ensure that you introduce Bills which ultimately become Acts of Parliament by seeking to situate the development of Trinidad and Tobago in the context of global norms and mores, which can be implemented directly or customized to suit our national situation?

Last May, when I had the honour and privilege to address the African Union Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, I listened attentively to Heads of State and Government of that great continent, embracing the vision for Africa's development based on the African Union's Agenda 2063. I was inspired by the focus that was being placed on the development of the continent for the benefit of the peoples of that continent. The vision for the development of Africa calls for harnessing of its natural and human resources, but is also mindful of the synergies which exist in the world at large.

We in Trinidad and Tobago must also have a vision for our sustainable development in a world which continues to change ever so rapidly before our very eyes at every opportunity. Are we going to ensure that the laws passed by this Parliament take into consideration the 17 sustainable development goals, the SDGs, agreed to by the United Nations for a new development agenda for the next 15 years? These goals will replace the millennium development goals which expire at the end of this year.

It is my sincere hope that post 2015 development agenda which will be adopted by world leaders at a summit which begins at the United Nations Headquarters in New York this very Friday, September 25th, would influence our

President's Address
[HIS EXCELLENCY]

Wednesday, September 23, 2015

own development agenda for the next 15 years. We may very well need to revise and update our manifestos. These SDGs emphasize the importance of the social, economic and environmental aspects of development to the national development of States.

I have examined the SDGs and find them to be a useful and instructive benchmark on which we could centre our developmental agenda. They seek to cater for the total development of the peoples of the global and are as follows:

- 1) End poverty in all its forms everywhere;
- 2) End hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture;
- 3) Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages;
- 4) Ensure inclusive and equitable quality of education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all;
- 5) Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;
- 6) Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all;
- 7) Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all;
- 8) Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all;
- 9) Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation;
- 10) Reduce inequality within and among countries;
- 11) Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable;
- 12) Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns;
- 13) Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts;
- 14) Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development;
- 15) Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss;

President's Address

Wednesday, September 23, 2015

- 16) Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; and finally, number 17 and I emphasize
- 17) Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.

As your President, I humbly suggest that all parliamentarians familiarize themselves with all 17 of these goals and the numerous targets and indicators which have been agreed to by all United Nations' Member States, including Trinidad and Tobago.

At the same time, I further humbly request that you pay greater attention to the passage of implementing legislation to give domestic legal effect to legally binding international obligations which flow from treaties and other international agreements to which Trinidad and Tobago is a State Party. As a country, ratifying or acceding to treaties is not enough. This Eleventh Parliament of the people of Trinidad and Tobago should not allow five years to lapse without the enactment of legislation to give effect domestically to, for example, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which the country ratified on June 25th of this year. Any failure to domesticate the provisions of this landmark convention would impair in a fundamental way the rights of some of our citizens who are differently abled but who continue to make an invaluable contribution to national development.

Ladies and gentlemen, every successful businessperson has plans for the long term. And in our modern global economy of massive international trade, capital flows and rapid technological change, long-term vision is critical, crucial and prudent to adept sustainability. This is true for Government as it is for business. Too often, our indigenous entrepreneurs are let down by the short-term views of Government. I remain positive that those trends will be reversed so that they match the long-term aspirations of our citizens. Citizens expect, nay demand, that those in leadership demonstrate a clear and unwavering commitment to the long-term sustainable development of our nation.

This Republic does not exist in a vacuum. We are influenced by factors and forces over which we sometimes have no control. As the economists and business people seated among us here will confirm, if you fail to participate in shaping the global economic system, you will be shaped by it, and it is up to us to be proactive in managing this exercise.

President's Address
[HIS EXCELLENCY]

Wednesday, September 23, 2015

We must get past the blame game and set the required course of action to transform our economy as necessitated by world economics. What we do have control over is our reaction and ability to adapt and transform accordingly.

This is the framework within which the Eleventh Parliament will be operating and their work, your work, will be instrumental and determinative in developing strategies to deal with these global and local challenges. But it is not all doom and gloom. We are a nation of innovation, strength and resilience but sometimes in governance, we can be myopic. The benefits of collaboration and cooperation among political parties with a view to solving national issues are often lost upon us.

Circumstances sometimes dictate that we break from the norm as demonstrated by the Commonwealth of Dominica. Recovering from the effects of tropical storm Erika, both the Honourable Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit and the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Lennox Linton have undertaken to combine their efforts via the National Reconstruction Advisory Committee which consists of all parliamentarians dictated to overseeing the rehabilitation efforts to ensure equity and transparency in the Commonwealth of Dominica. I daresay we can learn much from the collaborative governance displayed by this very small, inspiring country.

I suggest, in this regard, that the parliamentarians constructively engage institutions, officeholders, individuals, offering and obtaining advice rather than engaging in public posturing, brinksmanship and footworks when dealing with national issues.

Constructive engagement is also about 21st Century international benchmark practices of political civility and comity where for example, congratulating two leaders, one conceding and one victorious of the respective political parties for the maturity displayed in the easy and fluid transfer of political power, cannot in law or fact amount to appointing either.

Constitutional reform must therefore be transformational; 1962, ladies and gentlemen, is not 2015. Constitutional reform is therefore mandatory. There are issues that have become quite prominent in our society. Procurement legislation and campaign finance legislation must be prioritised in this Eleventh Parliament. As a side note, it is my intention to soon advertise locally, regionally and internationally, for a Procurement Regulator under the present procurement legislation.

We must remember, however, that as we move forward in this multi-ethnic and multicultural society we call home, we must pledge our unstinting allegiance to this nation of ours. We have to appreciate the many advantages that our diverse and unique society has afforded us, living side by side in peace and harmony, ever mindful that our national blessings, constitutional freedoms and rights, are privileges we must never take for granted.

This is not a time for recrimination and negative wrangling but a time for rallying all our troops to a common positive goal where service to country carries both pride and joy, where the vulnerable and the marginalized are not left behind, where there is enough to feed all and where hard work and industry are rewarded and encouraged. We need to give ourselves a chance to succeed and we can only do so if we share and commit ourselves to this single aspiration of a better T&T, one nation for all.

Why can we not all just get along? We can all get along because we must all get along if we are to salvage and confirm the human legacy with which we have been bestowed and I say burdened by Pope John Paul II and Bishop Desmond Tutu, who referred to Trinidad and Tobago as the “rainbow nation of the world”.

It is not by chance that a few days ago, the world celebrated World Peace Day and the timing could not be more perfect as we engage the transition from one Government to the next. In the aftermath of election 2015, the comments on social media were disappointing in the extreme. The currency of hate and divisiveness has no place in our society. We should know better than that. Perhaps, as a Parliament, you could have been more proactive in implementing cyber legislation that could well have pre-empted those unsavoury comments in social and traditional media.

But it is not too late and luckily you have a good head start. In April of this year, Form 4 students from Naparima Girls' High School, San Fernando, so disenchanted with the failure of the adult Parliament to address cybercrime, cyberbullying and general cyber misfeasance, garnered some 4,000 signatures in support of their petition to address these issues in the Parliament, and presented those signatures to the Office of the President. Hon. Members, I wish to publicly salute the youth activism for this progressive initiative and project by acknowledging: Rebecca Ann Jattan, Chelsea Morrison, Emily Ramsubir, Melanie Baboolal, Alviya Mir, Syama Jivana Ramnarine, Sharvaani Rampersad-Mahara, Shivani Persad-Maharaj, Sarah Hayatoola and Priyanka Ramsubhag of Naparima Girls' High School. I hope that their cybercrime initiative will come to life through the enactment of the relevant legislation in this Parliament.

President's Address
[HIS EXCELLENCY]

Wednesday, September 23, 2015

Business as usual has to be a thing of the past. We, as a people, cannot in good conscience, sit idly by while entire communities are under siege. You have only to open the newspapers and some of us our doors, to see and feel the debilitating effects of crime in our society. It is easy to lay blame on the doorstep of the incumbent Government or the past Government, but we are all responsible in more ways than one. There is a spirit of inhumanity that is sweeping through our nation, marked by a callous disregard for the sanctity of human life.

So ladies and gentlemen, parliamentarians, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, what are we going to do about this quagmire we find ourselves in?

Well, we can start by reigniting the good old, trustworthy trait known as “respect”. Respect in our society is becoming an increasingly scarce commodity. There seems to be a general breakdown in basic good manners and respect across many spheres, even in this honourable Parliament. The home, therefore, should be a catalyst for change, a place where members show respect for parental authority, civil authority, and the law of God. Respect for authority should begin in the home, carry over into the school, the workplace, the society and even in this Parliament.

Trinidad and Tobago has had and continues to be faced with its fair share of tough decisions to make, as regards crime, corruption and the threat of low oil prices. I have been advised that we ought not to panic unduly by these fluctuating oil prices. We have been in this business for over 100 years and we know the industry has frequent cyclical swings and also, ever so often, there is a market re-alignment that tends to have more to do with international politics than pure supply and demand mechanics. The signs sometimes point to the latter activity and with the application of appropriate and prudent measures, our country will weather the storm and ready itself to take advantage of the next up-cycle.

Notwithstanding, this Eleventh Parliament is coming into being at a time when resources are constrained and yet still has to find a way to navigate these challenging waters. I have faith, I have deep faith, I have profound faith, that the men and women of this Parliament, if they truly work together, can overcome any and all adversity and lead the way in maintaining and improving life in this blessed Republic.

In this spirit, I hope business leaders will get more involved in public policy issues. I think it is time for more of Trinidad and Tobago business leaders to step up to the plate and make their voices heard in areas that have a direct impact on the future of this country, particularly, the longer-term issues that we face as a

country, not just the issues you believe are important for your personal business or for your particular sector. Governments at every level cannot undertake such discussions alone and they cannot identify problems and propose solutions in a vacuum. The creation of a good public policy needs business leaders' perspectives and insight as well as those from other segments of society as part of engaged and fully informed public dialogue.

In our quest to repair Trinidad and Tobago, we must decry this growing philosophy of mediocrity. Mediocrity of any form is unacceptable. Unfortunately, mediocrity seems to be the order of the day and in all spheres, it seems that mediocrity is being accepted more and more as the norm. Quality service, value for money spent, treating customers fairly, respecting and honouring diversity, productivity and tolerance—they are all under siege. The solution to this mediocrity begins with the transformation of the man and the woman in the mirror.

Distinguished Members, education is the key to sustainability because if any country wants to secure its place in a competitive global world, it has to develop its human capital. An open and meritocratic education system is fundamental to establishing standards in our society—promoting and rewarding individual effort and commitment. It is the key to unleashing creativity for which this country is famous, and the key to accessing the full potential of our people.

A strong system of higher education provides a community with leaders building a sustainable research capacity in our education system. Our business sector is also expected to contribute and support the education goals of the Government, specifically as it relates to high quality research in science and technology. Such a contribution is essential to the sustainable economic growth of any country.

We each must do our part in creating a culture of learning and motivational ambition among our people and it begins with the very young. As an initiative in this direction, I have monthly "Lunch with the President" meetings with young primary school students between the ages of five and 12. I also made a promise as Head of State to visit every single school in Trinidad and Tobago and I have since visited some 28 primary schools going from classroom to classroom refusing to do school assemblies—the easy way out—to spread the message of hope, ambition and infinite possibilities in the lives of our schoolchildren, building self-esteem and a belief in themselves in terms of what is possible and probable in their lives.

President's Address
[HIS EXCELLENCY]

Wednesday, September 23, 2015

As adults, we like to tell young people what is required of them but we are not prepared to accept what they require of us. A youth Parliament, therefore, with powers of intervention must be part of any rejuvenated Constitution. Until such time, I will attempt to do what needs to be done. I have appointed three persons below the age of 40 and one in her late 20s as Independent Senators in this Eleventh Parliament. In passing, I also wish to mention that for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, the Office of the President will be hosting a two-day retreat to sensitize the nine Independent Senators of their duties and responsibilities and about the burdens that await them, the burdens that await them.

I will continue in my clarion call for appropriate legislation to lower the age requirement to be in the Senate. A Constitution must provide for the exceptional young man or woman that comes along in every generation. There was a young man under the age of 25 that I came across who can match strides with many of us in this august Chamber and he could have been appointed by this President if that bar was not in place. I considered a First Class Honours student that is visually impaired as a possible Independent Senator but I was informed that it will take a year or so to put Braille technology in place in this Parliament.

But this President is not giving up because I draw inspiration from the Caribbean region from the visually impaired. I have met and I have admired the Honourable Kerryann Ifill, the President of the Senate in the Barbadian Parliament. And how could I forget the Honourable Floyd Emerson Morris, fully blind since school age who persevered and obtained his Masters in Philosophy at UWI. In 1998, at the age of 29, he became a Senator and in 2013, became the President of the Jamaican Senate. We must inculcate in our society, in our Parliament, real and genuine inclusivity for all of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Yet all of us accept that Malala Yousafzai, that female activist in her youth has done far more for education, youth and woman empowerment than many world leaders and politicians in and out of their respective Parliaments. Ladies and gentlemen, this is an era of enlightenment. Informational reservoirs are in abundant supply and the young are demanding their space and their inclusivity in governance as never before and rightfully so.

Let me tell you a little story about the influence of education, values and the power of youth perspective in governance. Last week, when I was put on a spot in my office by a 17-year-old about the need to amend the composition of the Privileges Committee, my first thought was that as a nation, we must be doing

something right. Not because the Privileges Committee rules do not need amending but because we are raising a future generation of young people who are not just involved, but passionate about the issues of governance, parliamentary procedures, independence and autonomy.

Murvani Ojah-Maharaj is a sixth form student of Hillview College and he was, along with his classmates and colleagues of other schools, invited to attend a presentation of credential ceremony for an ambassador at the Office of the President as part of my youth initiative I implemented since I assumed office. This initiative affords our nation's schoolchildren a personal and up-close view of diplomacy, international relations and global democracy at work—matters normally reserved for adults in these august halls of Parliament and elsewhere.

3.40 p.m.

This young man submitted convincingly that the Privileges Committee, comprised as it is of members appointed by the Speaker in the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate in the Senate, both of whom are themselves politically appointed, can well lend itself to bias, or the perception of bias, and political alliances and interests in making decisions about the conduct or misconduct of parliamentary colleagues. This is Murvani's concern. And he mapped it out in a subsequent comprehensive letter to me to be conveyed to you the parliamentarians, if possible.

But there is a bigger, more lamentable picture that underlies this concern of bias, whether real or apparent, of the Privileges Committee. It is that even our young people are noticing the misconduct and misbehaviour of our country's leaders, parliamentarians and managers. They are also noticing the blatant lack of consequences for such misconduct by some of our parliamentarians.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran Pastor who ironically participated in the resistance movement against the Nazis said, and I quote:

“The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world it leaves to its children.”

Hon. Members, think about the Trinidad and Tobago we will leave to our children if we continue to throw stones at each other in and out of the Parliament, on the radio and TV shows; if we persist in the tired insults and degradations of each other because one side does not agree with the other on a particular Bill or policy, not on merit or demerit, but because of political or partisan allegiance.

Our young people are aware and they are paying attention and one day the young Murvanis will grow up and sit exactly in these seats of Parliament. We

President's Address
[HIS EXCELLENCY]

Wednesday, September 23, 2015

often forget that our Parliament is the *sanctum sanctorum* of our democracy. It gives effect to our Constitution which guards our human and civil rights, liberties and responsibilities.

The people of Trinidad and Tobago, those poorest, those wealthiest, those in between, our young people, they all repose, unflinched in faith, that our Parliament will deliver on their hopes, visions and expectations.

Hon. Members, if we recognize and we establish for ourselves the role of our Parliament as the *sanctum sanctorum* of our democracy, we are already on the right road. The urgency of now beckons. The time to get our actions right is now.

A better democracy and indeed better politics mean debating issues and not people; avoiding distorted truths, fallacies, conspiracies, and if I may coin it, “emotional unintelligence” in our debates and rather engaging values, facts, principles and truth. I assure you the consequences of so doing will be the faster, more fluid and effective passage of progressive laws; harmony and decorum in our Parliament and perhaps most impacting that each of you hon. Members here will be exemplars of honour and statesmanship to guide and inspire our young people. Call it the audacity of hope on my part. But I believe we can reform our conduct and give our nation, and especially our young people, something to look up to and believe in.

Hon. Parliamentarians, I hope I did not sound as if I was engaging in pontificating. It has to do with the profundity of my conviction which I want to share with you all.

Trinidad and Tobago, as we stand here at the dawn of this new Parliament, the future is pregnant with possibilities. Even though the current scenario is difficult, we must be positive in our approach to hard work, focused effort; teamwork will put us on the threshold of a new era, one that is bright with the prospect of unlimited opportunities and challenges, along with the promise of continuing reward. It is at times like these that you should reflect thankfully on the commitment, determination and dedication to duty of all of those who are here today and also to those who have gone before, who have contributed to our success thus far.

As we look forward to the activities of this Eleventh Parliament, I am sure citizens may be expecting to see more actions that serve to strengthen the governance structure of State machinery, enhancing disclosure and transparency and fostering an atmosphere of high ethical standards and compliance. These

measures will help to attract and protect investors, make the country more effective, more respected and restore integrity to civil society governance.

Finally, to you the parliamentarians, many of you present here today, you must be aware that you are the human face of the nation's developmental thrust. You are therefore a crucial point of interface between State action and the population. That is why we are here today, to give you this platform of positivity, to kick off your deliberations that will contribute affirmatively to the future development of Trinidad and Tobago.

To the many naysayers, I say broaden your horizon, think positively. Have some faith, do good and be good. You know, in the *Bible*, at Matthew Chapter 6, verses 25—33, there is a saying is of “oh ye of little faith.” In that context, these are not words. These are words of encouragement, not words of condemnation. It is in this spirit that I call upon all present and not present to join with us as we launch the opening of this Eleventh Parliament.

May God bless all of you. May all of you keep each other in your prayers and may God continue to bless this wonderful Republic called Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

3.48 p.m.: *His Excellency the President, accompanied by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, left the Chamber.*

4.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam Speaker: I would invite everyone to have a seat.

PAPER LAID

Address by His Excellency the President on the occasion of the Opening of the First Session of the Eleventh Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]

To be printed as a House Paper.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there being no other business, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to October 05, 2015, at 1.30 p.m. at which time we will present the budget for the service of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

**CONDOLENCES
(ERROL EDWARD MAHABIR)**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, before putting the question for the adjournment, it is with deep sadness that I inform you of the passing of one of our former Members, Mr. Errol Mahabir.

I now invite the House to bring condolences and I call upon the hon. Attorney General.

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Madam Speaker, Errol Edward Mahabir was a multidimensional person. His national accomplishment is certainly well known to Trinidad and Tobago; so numerous that on the rare occasion today I would actually condescend to paper to name a few.

He served with ministerial service as the Minister of Labour and Social Security, the Minister of Industry and Commerce, Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Minister of Petroleum and Mines, Minister of External Affairs and Member of Government in the period 1966—1986. He had 20 distinguished years as an elected Member of Parliament from no less a constituency than San Fernando West.

He spent 25 years in national service, having started in the local government forum. So moved was he to the call for public service that he started in that pursuit at the very noble structure of local government.

But his multidimensional character was certainly more profound as the first of 27 children from his father. Born to a very humble family, he took on the role as the head of his family. He certainly thrived in service to his family as it became extended over the years. Public service brought on to him a deep and personal affection for each and every person that he had the privilege to serve, as he often said.

Today is a very limited time to reflect upon how noble a man he was but suffice it to say, in seeking to run for that seat myself, the first port of call that I went to was none other than Errol Edward Mahabir. He was a spectacular father, a dedicated husband, a wonderful uncle, who stepped into the breach where any gap arose, be it on the death of his brother Mikey, be it where a family tragedy occurred, be it for a constituent, many years after he had actually served.

He was truly a man born from the love of liberty. He was a witness and participant to every great venture that this nation has seen; from our independence move forward, to the stabilization of Trinidad and Tobago, to the birthing of our

Condolences (Errol Edward Mahabir)

Wednesday, September 23, 2015

economy, to the prosperity which we now all enjoy. He will be missed. Trinidad and Tobago is a much darker place today without his presence, and on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, I bring condolences in particular to his wife Yvonne, his three children: Derrick, Collin and Jennifer, his grandchildren: Candice, Stephen and Carissa, Edward, Ashley and Natalia and to the very many members of his family. He lived up to his name Mahabir, the great hero, the great warrior and we are truly saddened by his loss.

I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Applause*]

Madam Speaker: I now call upon the hon. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Opposition Members join the Government and the national community in expressing our deep condolences on the death of the former parliamentarian and senior Cabinet Minister, Mr. Errol Mahabir. He was an outstanding political icon who will be remembered for his contribution to the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

Members of the House, Mr. Mahabir served the people of Trinidad and Tobago in various ministerial portfolios since he entered electoral politics in San Fernando.

During the 20 years in office, he served as Minister of Public Utilities, Industry and Commerce, Labour, Foreign Affairs, Petroleum and Mines. In his energy portfolio, he oversaw the creation of the National Gas Company, which was conceptualized with a view to delivering offshore gas directly to the industries at Point Lisas.

Mr. Mahabir was a committed and dedicated patriot who raised the profile of Trinidad and Tobago at home and abroad during his professional term of office.

He became one of the three deputy political leaders of the PNM and was, indeed, in line to be appointed Prime Minister on the death of Dr. Eric Williams in March 1981. Mr. Mahabir retired from active politics following the 1986 general election.

Given his enormous contribution to this country which our colleague, Attorney General, read before me, in 2010, it was the honour of the Persad-Bissessar administration to award Mr. Mahabir the Chaconia Gold Medal for his long and dedicated service to Trinidad and Tobago.

Condolences (Errol Edward Mahabir)
[DR. MOONILAL]

Wednesday, September 23, 2015

Mr. Mahabir rose from humble beginnings to national and international prominence but will always be remembered as a humble, kind, loving man.

Madam Speaker, may I also indicate that Mr. Mahabir helped me greatly during my PhD years, when he kindly gave me the original collection of his speeches as Minister of Labour in Trinidad and Tobago, which I still have now as a treasured collection in my own library.

Madam Speaker, he has been a mentor to me and quite a solid rock of guidance in my own political life and in the political lives of many parliamentarians here today. His life after politics was dedicated to business, assisting his family with the management of their company and assisting several other business persons in Trinidad and Tobago.

Today this country is poorer for the loss of this humble and patriotic son. We will all miss him. We take this opportunity to extend to Yvonne and his children and grandchildren and family our deepest condolences and may his soul rest in peace. [*Applause*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I join in offering condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of the late Errol Edward Mahabir.

In becoming a founding member and former deputy political leader for the People's National Movement, he assisted in the transition of this nation from colonialism to Independence.

Mr. Mahabir rose from very humble beginnings to national recognition and yet he never forgot his origins. I guess he can be aptly described by the words of the poet Rudyard Kipling who said: though he learned to walk with kings he never lost the common touch.

As we have noted, Mr. Mahabir was best known for his 20-year tenure in public life. During his political service he served this nation proudly but never sought any praise or accolades, rather he was comfortable only with the knowledge that he gave of his best to his country. A husband, a father, a grandfather, a brother, a friend, a colleague and a servant of our nation. Mr. Errol Edward Mahabir stands as a model citizen and as a pillar or true stewardship. He will be surely missed.

I now invite all to stand for one moment of silence in respectful observance.

The House of Representatives stood.

Condolences (Errol Edward Mahabir)

Wednesday, September 23, 2015

May the soul of Mr. Errol Edward Mahabir rest in eternal peace.

Hon. Members, I have directed the Clerk of the House to convey our condolences to the family of Mr. Errol Mahabir. May I invite you all to sit.

REPUBLIC DAY GREETINGS

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, as we all know, tomorrow, September 24, we celebrate Republic Day and I now will invite Members of the House to bring greetings. I call on the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC (*Siparia*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I also take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election as Speaker of the House.

Tomorrow we celebrate our 39th year as a democratic Republic within the Commonwealth and so I am very pleased, on behalf of the Opposition Bench, to acknowledge the maturity with which we handled the political change which happened just a few days ago.

While many issues are yet to be resolved, the peaceful transition from one Government to another is a tribute to all of Trinidad and Tobago. From time to time, we have shown the world that whilst we may have differences, we are one people respecting our democracy and the will of the people.

In 1961, we did achieve political freedom but the nation was not yet born. It took another 15 years before we broke formal ties with Great Britain and proclaimed our Republic, trusting in God and the commitment of people to live together in harmony as we began the task of nation-building. Our 1976 Constitution was and remains an expression of our desire to respect one another and to recognize each other's rights, freedom of speech and freedom of association.

It also ensures the rule of law and equality of citizens, regardless of religious, social, ethnic, or political considerations. And so today I say let us recommit ourselves to those values and to respecting one another as enshrined in our Republican Constitution. I say let us all rededicate ourselves to the service of Trinidad and Tobago, especially to the thousands who need food, shelter and clothing for themselves and their families.

I say also let us pledge to protect the freedoms we enjoy, to protect our families from harm and to continue to live as one family looking after one another.

Republic Day Greetings
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR SC]

Wednesday, September 23, 2015

In 39 years together, we have worked hard at building a nation which is strong, free and independent but the task is still incomplete. And so I say, let us keep the torch burning and stand on guard for Trinidad and Tobago.

The future of our great country lies in our hands. We must discuss our differences openly and respectfully and that is what our Republican democracy is about; to continue to be vigilant, to never allow anyone to trample our rights and to always banish from our thoughts hate and divisiveness, which are cancers that have destroyed other societies.

The celebration of Republic Day, in my respectful view, is a rededication to our values as one people, under one God, with a common goal regardless of our differences.

As leaders it is our responsibility to put aside personal interest and to serve our communities faithfully. And so we pledge to honour that commitment.

I wish every one of you a very safe and respectful and peaceful Republic Day. May God continue to bless each of you and your families and may God continue to bless Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Applause*]

Madam Speaker: I call upon the hon. Prime Minister. [*Applause*]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity and may I begin by recognizing your new regalia and congratulate you most heartily for your acceptance of the Office of Speaker of this honourable House.

Madam Speaker, our 39th year as an independent nation should cause us to reflect on how far we have come and how much further we have to go. It is all well and good to celebrate and to have comments about our own selves, while not acknowledging that we are but a part of a much larger whole. And our independence, like our education, is an ongoing process and it requires eternal vigilance.

We have just come through a very bruising election period, not just an election day. It was a period of activity in the nation. And today, within hours of our Republican observances, I, holding the Office as Prime Minister, would like to emphasize that the elections are over and there is no room for hatred, bitterness, rancour or invective and the pleasure of having your office being seconded today by our colleagues on the other side indicate the possibilities of a good beginning, and that would be a worthy contribution to our acknowledgement of our Republican status.

I am pleased to hear my colleague on the other side speak of our severing of ties with our colonial master, but there is one rope still tied to the pier and I am hoping that we will loosen that rope in the very near future and make the Caribbean Court of Justice our final Court of Appeal.

Madam Speaker, we acknowledge that our national conversation has not been very elevating for most days and many nights. But maybe if we accept what has been said by my colleague on the other side a moment ago, that we should not be afraid or ashamed to discuss all our issues and discuss them openly, then we could very easily say to ourselves, with some conviction, that we are in fact advancing our freedoms and our independence.

We, charged with the responsibility, all of us, on both sides of the House and the other place, would do well to pay some more attention to the fact that we are in control of our own destiny. And while there might be circumstances beyond us, from which our own status might not be able to influence those challenges, there are things that we can and must do if we are to improve the lot of every citizen in Trinidad and Tobago.

4.20 p.m.

So on this day, we use the opportunity to say to all who we hold dear, and that is every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago and all who look to us within the context of our oath of office, that our republican status will remain within the eyes of all of us and we give the assurance that we will make ourselves available to work very closely with our colleagues on the other side and make full use of all the time that is available to us in this parliamentary term, this Eleventh Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

So having said that, Madam Speaker, I wish, on behalf of my colleagues on this side and on those outside of the House who would want to so do wish, all our citizens a safe and happy and acknowledged Republic Day 2015. [*Applause*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I join in conveying Republic Day greetings on this very auspicious occasion which coincides with the celebration of the 39th anniversary of republican status of our beloved nation.

I endorse the sentiments expressed here by the hon. Leader of the Opposition and by the hon. Prime Minister. I too believe that our nation's achievement as a democratic country over the years must not be taken for granted. Hon. Members, despite what all may say, our democracy is stable, our democracy is strong.

Republic Day Greetings
[MADAM SPEAKER]

Wednesday, September 23, 2015

Without a doubt, the supreme power rests in all citizens of our country who are eligible to vote and our citizens are safeguarded by our Republican Constitution with entrenched fundamental rights and human freedoms.

These ideals are central to our democracy and the well-being of our citizenry. We are a happy, spirited people and we are strong in our family values. We are therefore a blessed people with much to celebrate. Therefore, hon. Members, let us all now with dignity and pride join together with the nation as one united people in observing this very important day in our history and wish the people of Trinidad and Tobago a happy and blessed Republic Day.

May God bless our nation. [*Applause*]

APPRECIATION

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, may I seek one more indulgence of this House to thank you for the privilege to serve this country as Speaker. I accept it with a deep sense of humility. I assure you that it will be my constant endeavour to serve this House and our beloved country faithfully and to maintain the highest parliamentary standards and traditions which are well known to this august House.

Allow me to convey gratitude to the Speaker who just demitted office and who is now in the other place, and also to convey gratitude to many other Speakers who sat in this Chair, some of whom I recognize here today and who have sat and protected the rights and dignity of this honourable House.

I am confident from all that was said by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition and by the hon. Prime Minister that we, Members, together can render the best of service to our beloved Trinidad and Tobago, which is all that is expected of us. I thank you once more. [*Applause*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.25 p.m.