



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Debates of the House of Representatives

4th Session – 10th Parliament (Rep.) – Volume 20 – Number 1

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)**

THE HONOURABLE WADE MARK
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE NELA KHAN
DEPUTY SPEAKER

Friday 2nd August, 2013

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**THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT
IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE TENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON JUNE 18, 2010**

SESSION 2013—2014

VOLUME 1

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, August 02, 2013

1.30 P.M.

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

REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

No. 5 of 2013.

[L.S.]

By His Excellency ANTHONY THOMAS
AQUINAS CARMONA, S.C., President and
Commander-in-Chief 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 Fourth Session of the Tenth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago shall be held and 1.30 p.m. on Friday the 2nd day of August, 2013, 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 Tobago, at the Office of
the President, St. Ann's, this 28th day of June, 2013.

Prayers

Friday, August 02, 2013

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication and correspondence from the Chief Election Officer dated July 30, 2013, which reads as follows:

“Honourable Wade Mark
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Honourable Speaker,
Re: Chaguanas West By-Election 2013

Further to my letter dated 29th inst. to your good self on the above subject and pursuant to the Election Rule 108(5)(b)(i) of the Representation of the People Act, Chap. 2:01, I wish to confirm the result of the by-election held on Monday 29th July, 2013, namely that Mr. Jack Austin Warner is the candidate elected to represent the Electoral District of Chaguanas West in the House of Representatives.

Yours faithfully
Sgd. Mr. Ramesh Nanan
Chief Election Officer (Ag.)
Elections and Boundaries Commission”

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Jack Austin Warner took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon Members, I received communication from the hon. Anil Roberts, Member of Parliament for D’Abadie/O’Meara, who is out of the country and has asked to be excused from sittings of the House during the period July 29 to August 12, 2013. [*Crosstalk*] May I seek your indulgence by being silent? The hon. Rodger Samuel, Member of Parliament for Arima, and Miss Alicia Hospedales, Member of Parliament of Arouca/Maloney, have asked to be excused from today’s sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

Leave of Absence

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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.

1.39 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

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

2.18 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

Hon. Prime Minister, hon. Chief Justice, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House of Representatives, hon. Leader of the Opposition, other Members of the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament, with a warm welcome to the four newly appointed Senators and the Member for Chaguanas West, specially invited guests, representatives of the media, other distinguished ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon to you all.

The ceremonial opening of the Fourth Session of the Tenth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago affords me, as head of Parliament, the opportunity to share with you, hon. Members, issues vital in realizing the vision of good governance to which we must all aspire.

As a parliamentary democracy, the Parliament is the vehicle by which we, the citizens, govern ourselves, through both elected and unelected representatives. It is in this vein that I wish to draw attention to the importance of effective cooperation and the interdependence of the various arms of Parliament—the President, the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Hon. Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, it has been suggested that given the power exercised by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet in the Westminster model, a more accurate, contemporary description of parliamentary government might well be Cabinet or prime-ministerial government. And yet the philosophy that informs the Westminster model of government, and which has provided the basis for our political institutions and norms, reflects the premise, according to Gerald Schmitz, 1998, in his book, the *Opposition in a Parliamentary System*:

“A delicate balance must be maintained between permitting elected governments to govern and legislate effectively, and ensuring that power is exercised with care and with respect for minorities and for dissenting views.”

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[ANTHONY THOMAS AQUINAS CARMONA SC]

The term “delicate balance” is significant. My predecessor, President George Maxwell Richards, has highlighted the fact that the Government is accountable to the Parliament and that, and I quote, “oversight of the Government on behalf of the public is Parliament’s role and not only a role only for the Opposition.”

Now, it is the proper business and duty of an Opposition to persuade the people that the approaches and policies that it advocates constitute an improvement on what is being proposed by the Government of the day. But by devoting the required time and care to scrutinizing legislation and policies proposed by the Government, and by offering constructive informed criticism, not only the Opposition but all parliamentarians may be expected to cooperate in holding the Government accountable, obliging it to defend and justify its policies and administrative decisions, and to reconsider, even amend, proposals so that they are more in keeping with what may be perceived as the general good.

2.30 p.m.

Timely receipt of policy documents and draft Bills is an imperative to facilitate both scrutiny and the counterproposals of all parliamentarians. As the engine room for national political debate, Parliament then must be about the people’s business, not the party’s business. In other words, as leaders and lawmakers, parliamentarians of differing political persuasions are still expected to cooperate on matters that promote the development, security and uplifting of the society. Once a delicate balance is struck, all parliamentarians may seem to be cooperating, even collaborating, to ensure that Bills passed are in the wider public interest.

Indeed, I can think immediately of two areas in which such collaboration might be considered both feasible and timely. I refer first to the Caribbean Court of Justice, which is located in the heart of Port of Spain. We currently have legislation that gives jurisdiction to the International Criminal Court, to the ad hoc International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, yet we have none that recognizes the final appellate jurisdiction of the CCJ in all areas of litigation.

Let there be a vote of conscience by secret ballot on whether it becomes the final court of appeal, or, if as parliamentarians, you lack the confidence—

Miss Mc Donald: Um-hmm.

His Excellency The President:—to make that change, place it before the electorate by way of public referendum on the ballot paper.

The upcoming local government election in two months' time affords an ideal opportunity for doing this. We must no longer pussyfoot on this matter.

The second issue, election campaign financing, is a veritable juggernaut that results in financiers arrogating political power unto themselves, and thereby undermining the system of governance and democracy as we know it. Curiously, without exception, when political parties are in Opposition they call for transparency in campaign financing, yet, when in the seat of power, they conveniently neglect to address the issue.

Miss Mc Donald: Hmm!

His Excellency The President: Madam, we must get really serious about this. It applies to all and sundry.

The time has come that we must bite the bullet of campaign financing reform and introduce appropriate measures for disclosure, reporting and enforcement laws to ensure transparency and accountability in the management of the country's electoral system. This will certainly build citizens' confidence and enhance our system of democratic governance. The need for legislation creating, for example—that has obtained in Jamaica for the last 10/15 years—a Contractor General to address the issue of tendering procedures must be considered.

Additionally, for many years, many, many years, there have been allegations of profligate enrichment of person by persons in authority. There have been complaints and observations for just as many years that the asset base of politicians is inconsistent with their income and tax returns and there has been a hue and cry for the intervention of the Integrity Commission or the Fraud Squad. Why are we taking such a route when we can wake up that sleeping giant called the Board of Inland Revenue? Rise from your slumber. Do what you are empowered to do. The empire of Mafia boss Al Capone was destroyed by his conviction of the crime of tax evasion.

Only yesterday, Silvio Berlusconi, the former Prime Minister of Italy, was convicted of tax evasion by the highest court of his land. Ever since I worked at the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, this has been my clarion call to persons in authority throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The rejoinder from those in authority at national fora was a jaundiced eye in my direction and a deafening silence.

Crime continues to be scourge of our society. If ever there was a time to cooperate and engage in realistic bipartisan methods, the time is now. For far too

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long we have addressed the issue of crime with a focus on containment and not from a more holistic perspective. Legislation in the Parliament appears to deal figuratively with the bolted horse and not the horse in the stable. For instance, laws addressing parental responsibility must be considered to ensure that the child or the juvenile does not become a criminal because of the recalcitrant parent.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I end this appeal for cooperation, I would also add that while meetings between the President and the Prime Minister may be regarded by some as a mere exercise in the formal reporting, they do provide an opportunity for the Government to hear the views of the non-aligned in the decision-making process and I dare say this has been a successful exercise.

I wish to turn my attention to the timing of presentations and the influence it exercises on the content of the parliamentary debates. What advantage is there in having issues debated at two and three o'clock in the morning? [*Applause*] How does this compare with the disadvantage of a severely reduced complement of representatives, coupled with the obvious exhaustion of those who have managed or who have been obliged to stay the course? Does this really augur well for the quality of parliamentary contributions?

Should major decisions in this, the highest lawmaking body in the land, be made when decision-makers are often barely awake? Would it not be preferable to start parliamentary sessions earlier? It is highly unproductive to begin sessions at 1.30 p.m. subject to the vagaries of a heavy lunch and oppressive humidity. [*Laughter*] And I do hope that you all, all of you clap on this suggestion. As the head of Parliament, I strongly suggest that Parliament begin at 8.00 a.m., as we all do in this country, to deal more efficiently and effectively with the nation's business. [*Applause*]

The earlier practice of having parliamentarians not read from a written, prepared speech was intended to encourage them to respond to issues raised, rather than repeat at length arguments already explored or reintroduce points upon which there is already clear agreement. Debating is a skill. I must inform sometimes the uninformed. It is a skill that must be developed. It is indeed a sore diversion to observe parliamentarians reading speeches. It can lead to a lack of reasoned arguments and needless regurgitation. Perhaps in this regard we need to employ mediation and alternative dispute resolution techniques to arrest this problem.

Moreover, while the prepared speeches of MPs might score political points, they do not enable the listening public to scrutinize and to develop a critical

understanding of national issues and how various pieces of legislation might affect them immediately and in the longer term.

We are reminded also, that as trustees of the nation's patrimony and resources, Government's role is one of steward and not benefactor. The elected Government of the day is not a benefactor of the nation's riches but rather a facilitator of its distribution. The Government of the day should ensure that the nation's resources are evenly and fairly distributed, not based on how one chooses to cast one's vote.

Miss Mc Donald: Hmm.

His Excellency The President: It makes a mockery of a democracy if the exercise of my civic right attracts punishment, verbal flagellation and marginalization. Regrettably, this has been the modus of successive Governments. *[Applause]*

In keeping with this, I posed the same question in my address to the Tobago House of Assembly on April 26, this year, and I quote:

“How often, as leaders, we see the need to protect the voiceless, the marginalized and the dispossessed among us and we see this strictly in terms of class and other social structures, conveniently forgetting that it equally applies in the arena of politics? Remember, where there is no representation, voices can be silenced.

Mohandas Gandhi once said ‘I understand democracy as something that gives the weak the same chance as the strong’.

Dear Assemblymen and women, you have the responsibility to ensure that no one in Tobago, or Trinidad, suffers from the vagaries of what I will ‘term majority politics’.”

Madam Prime Minister, Mr. Senate President, Mr. Speaker, hon. Members all, I bring to my office the conviction that the Parliament must be an engine for positive change and today, when the concept of civility seems to be everywhere under threat, the issue of dignity and decorum in parliamentary conduct is a matter of grave importance. This must not be lost on parliamentarians.

Paragraph seven of the Resolution 19/03/2012 of the Council of Europe includes this interesting statement, and I quote:

“Members’ conduct is first and foremost a matter of personal belief and conviction, however, their behaviour has to meet the expectations of those who placed their confidence in an elected representative...the declared

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commitment to abide by the code of conduct depends from the outset on Members' willingness to comply with it in good faith."

Every hon. Member present today has taken the oath to bear true faith and allegiance to Trinidad and Tobago and to conscientiously and impartially discharge the responsibilities to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is time to consider whether we are in contravention of the oath that we have taken, whether we have fallen short.

Is our greatest allegiance to our country or are there competing allegiances? Can we say that we are discharging our duties in a manner that is scrupulous, painstaking, principled and governed by conscience? If we cannot, my fellow parliamentarians, then we have not done as we have sworn to do. We are in breach of our contract with the citizens of the nation. What our nation needs at this time is a return to honour.

The challenge we have faced for many, many years is a lack of personal credibility in our leaders and those in authority in every sphere, and where the leaders go, the nation follows. The question has been asked: what is left when honour is lost?

Miss Mc Donald: Um-hmm.

2.45 p.m.

His Excellency The President: Ladies and gentlemen, honour cannot be legislated. Honour does not only involve distinguishing between right and wrong. Honour demands that we eschew the very perception of wrongdoing and impropriety. A university education does not make one honourable. Wealth does not make one honourable. High rank or position does not make one honourable. Ladies and gentlemen, to be honourable requires that one commit to always doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do, regardless of the consequences and ignoring the potential rewards of doing otherwise.

It is honour in leadership that will inspire confidence in our people and result in the stability of our nation. Our nation is depending on honourable leaders in Parliament to demonstrate the understanding that they are called both to lead and to serve, and it is in faithful and conscientious service that honour lies. Leadership must be inspired and inspiring and, parliamentarians, you sometimes fall short in the conduct you display in and out of Parliament. And this brings me to another aspect of parliamentary conduct.

I am no stranger to "fatigue" and no one enjoys well-placed "picong" as much as I do, having been, of course, a former calypsonian, [*Laughter*] but the rule that says

Members participating in debate must address the Speaker is one way of discouraging direct-heated exchanges and forestalling the introduction of offensive, insulting, provocative or threatening language. The impulse to engage in theatrics may well prove irresistible when one is in sight of television cameras.

However—[*Interruption*—Ma'am, I am speaking about conduct—indulging in forms of communication that denigrate and degrade not only compromise the substance of a debate, but, more importantly, it signals to the larger public, and especially to our impressionable children, that crass behaviour and disrespect are acceptable modes of conduct and communication. Wherever we find ourselves, our conduct should reflect the gravity of the responsibility entrusted to us.

Today in our nation, there is a tendency to ignore or to downplay the respect that accrues to public offices. The person in the seat of the Opposition Leader, according to the Westminster form of Government, is a Prime Minister in waiting. The Prime Minister of the day is the Prime Minister and ought to be addressed like this. The President of the Senate is the President of the Senate. The Speaker of the House is the Speaker of the House. But while it is the responsibility of a mature public to respect the offices of the land, it is also the responsibility of the officeholders to earn the respect by their conduct while in office.

Four and a half months ago, on assuming the presidency, I swore to preserve and defend the Constitution and the law and to devote myself to the service and well-being of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. There are elements of the preamble in our Constitution that have resonated with me and which have encouraged me, in addition to my constitutional duties, to embark on various initiatives aimed at helping to preserve, in particular, the spirit of our Constitution.

One of these is the involvement of students as witnesses to important ceremonies and high-profile visits, as a means of bringing them into close contact with leaders both local and foreign. "Lunch with the President" initiative, for example, allows the nation's children the opportunity to engage with the presidency in a personal way, drawing them into the governance process, and encouraging them to participate in the future development of Trinidad and Tobago by affirming their special value to the nation.

For the same reason, I want to commend the outreach programme of the Parliament which includes school visits by the Senate President and Speaker of the House and tours of the Parliament. For far too long, ours has been a democracy practised in ignorance. The Parliament's outreach programme is yet

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another means of sensitizing our young people to the importance and responsibility of Parliament and parliamentarians.

In this regard, I wish to raise the issue of the constitutional provision that no person under the age of 25 can qualify to be a Senator in the Upper House. It is not about the size of the cranium of a 25-year-old. This is a dinosaur piece of legislation lacking in vision. In every generation there comes along an exceptional human being under the age of 25 and there should be a constitutional provision for such an occurrence.

The majority of parliamentarians here today will never get the opportunity to address the United Nations General Assembly, as 16-year-old Malala Yousafzai did in her defiant response to Taliban militants who attempted to take her life and destroy her dream of change and education. Young Malala stated and I quote:

“They thought that the bullets would silence us, but they failed. And out of that silence came thousands of voices...nothing changed in my life, except this: weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power and courage were born...[I am not] here to speak in terms of personal revenge...I do not even hate the Talib who shot me...This is the compassion I have learned from Mohammed, the prophet of mercy, Jesus Christ and Lord Buddha. This is the legacy of change I have inherited from Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and Mohammed Ali Jinnah. This is the philosophy of non-violence that I have learned from Gandhi, Bacha Khan and Mother Teresa.”

Hon. parliamentarians and my dear judges of the Supreme Court of Trinidad and Tobago, I adhere fully to a philosophy that celebrates both the independence and the compassion of the human spirit. I will not, therefore, be burdened by the cronyism of the past and the present, or engage in a fossilized interpretation of my constitutional remit. I will not budge from engaging progressive change, nor will I be bullied by those who cannot cope with such change.

The President's door will be open to provide access to those outside the corridors of power, influence and contact, so that their existence and their desire to serve will not be limited by their seeming anonymity. I have a deep respect for institutional memory and it has its place in relevance, but I also believe in creating lines of succession and, for far too long, with consecutive Governments, we have the same faces with the same old philosophies and the same tired ideas.

We need a nation to engage our young intellectuals and not simply speak of the Singapore model without ensuring that our best and brightest are in governance

and in the Parliament. This President, maybe much to the chagrin of some, will not engage, figuratively speaking, in the recycling of empty plastic bottles.

Before closing, allow me to refer to my inaugural address in which I stated that there are powers which the President has and powers which he does not have. As a general rule, in the exercise of his functions, the President is mandated to act in accordance with the advice of the Cabinet or a Minister acting under the general authority of the Cabinet. However, this general rule does not always apply. May I repeat, this general rule does not always apply.

At times he is required to act in his discretion, or after consultation with some other person or authority. Where the President is required to act in his own discretion, as, for example, in the appointment of the Leader of the Opposition, he may undoubtedly seek the counsel of any person who in his judgement could be of assistance. He may also choose not to consult with anyone at all. At the end of the day the decision is his and his alone.

Similarly, when the President is required to act after consultation with some person or authority, it is expected that he will engage in a meaningful process of consultation, and this is reflected in the rule, *omnia [presumuntur] rite esse acta*, the presumption of regularity. But again, having done so, the decision is his and his alone.

On the other hand, where the President is required to act in accordance with the advice of the Cabinet, or a Minister acting under the general authority of Cabinet, or some other person or authority, he is obliged to act on that advice. In these instances, the decision is not his but that of the person on whose advice he must act.

Nevertheless, the advice tendered to the President must itself be lawful. The President is not obliged to act in accordance with advice which is contrary to the law, that is illegal, unconstitutional and/or outside of the jurisdiction of the person tendering the advice. If it is against the law, he is duty-bound to ignore any such advice. For example, the President would be obliged to reject the advice of the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition to appoint someone to the post of Senator who is not qualified under the Constitution to hold that position.

Additionally—of course it does not apply here—it is now commonplace that, in appropriate circumstances, the President would delay implementation of the advice tendered to him in order that he may bring to the attention of the decision-maker matters which, in his considered but restrained judgment, might have been overlooked.

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Two of my important constitutional duties as President of the Republic I have already exercised are the appointment of Independent Senators and members of the Integrity Commission. Under the Constitution and applicable legislation, the former appointment is made in my own discretion while the latter is made by me after relevant consultation. Therefore, responsibility for these choices rests entirely on my shoulders. In making such appointments, I will always be true to my oath of office to conscientiously and impartially discharge the functions of President. In respect of such appointments, the buck stops with me and these shoulders are broad.

I saw a need to retool the composition of the Independent Senatorial Bench. I have listened and I have also observed for years the gaps in that composition. Where were the detractors in the last three years when there were no energy expert on the Independent Bench, no person who is differently abled for some 50 years and no internationally recognized expert and academic in international finance? Where were you men and women of letters?

3.00 p.m.

Constitutionally, of equal importance to my independent exercise of judgment in making the appointments are the powers vested in the Prime Minister and another Minister of Government to advise me to appoint particular persons named by them to various positions. Such Ministers bear the responsibility for such selections, although the actual instruments of appointment are under the hand of the President. I am simply upholding the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago and the law when I give effect to these decisions when they are lawfully to be made by others.

It is important that the public understand this Constitutional principle and the reason for it. I have no authority to refuse to appoint the persons put forward by the Prime Minister or other Ministers, or in some instances the Leader of the Opposition. It would be constitutionally incorrect for me to seek to do so. Just as selections properly made by me in my own judgment are constitutionally required to be accepted by others, likewise, as President, I am required to accept the choices made by others in accordance with the applicable constitutional or statutory provisions. I will make my own decisions when I am authorized by the Constitution or other law so to do, but in respect of a matter where the authority to make the decisions is vested in another person, I will follow the Constitution, the convention and the law and give effect to that decision.

However, it is still quite proper, in my humble view, for a president to counsel and warn against any advice or recommendation he considers to be unwise, and

this I have done with a measure of success, but the President cannot refuse to execute a lawful decision made by a Minister or the Leader of the Opposition under the Constitution. As President I understand this very clearly and it is important that public also recognize and appreciate the importance of this constitutional position. In the regard I note, many times, intellectual dishonesty often masquerades itself as critical analysis.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have used this occasion of the opening of this Fourth Session of the Tenth Parliament to again raise the issues of faithful service, and personal honour probity in public affairs. A new session invariably gives rise, in its own small way, to the excitement of a new beginning; a new beginning informed at once by an awareness of new and ongoing challenges and the understanding that meeting these challenges may require previously unplumbed levels of commitment to the ideal of nation building.

Ladies and gentlemen, parliamentarians, always be patriots in this august assembly. I am confident however, that we have the courage and the wisdom to treat with all challenges successfully. I wish you great health. I wish your families and friends good health and success. I ask you to remember your families and remember the sacrifices they make when you come to the Parliament and when you stay in the Parliament for very long hours. Remember that when you lose those moments, they are lost forever.

I feel, with the greatest of confidence, that with this renewed vigour, with this renewed vision, that you can have a productive session and I thank you for the courtesy of your kind attention. May God bless this Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you. [*Applause*]

3.06 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

His Excellency the President, accompanied by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, left the Chamber.

3.18 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

PAPER LAID

Address by His Excellency the President on the occasion of the opening of the Fourth Session of the Tenth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*The Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal)*]

To be printed as a House Paper.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER**Parliamentary Agenda**

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Government I thank you for this opportunity to address this honourable House at this, the start of the Fourth Session of the Tenth Parliament. I also offer my thanks and congratulations to His Excellency, President Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona on his insightful and thought-provoking maiden speech at this ceremonial opening of the Parliament. Hon. Speaker, His Excellency reminded us of our duties and responsibilities to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and has challenged us to truly become advocates on behalf of the people.

Mr. Speaker, as we move into this Fourth Session of the Tenth Parliament, following perhaps what was one of most strongly contested by-elections in this country's history, what we witnessed over the past weeks was, in my respectful view, democracy in action. It is a tribute to our nation's founding fathers who enshrined in our Constitution the rights that our people demonstrated and the freedom to join a party of their choice and elect the person they consider best qualified to represent them in this august Chamber, and so I take this opportunity to welcome back to the Parliament the Member for Chaguanas West. The hon. Member is no stranger to this House. We on this side look forward to positive contributions and support from him as the Parliament continues its business.

Mr. Speaker, we are operating under the very watchful gaze of a discerning and demanding public. We are representatives of the people and we are here to deal with the people's business. We accept our responsibility as servants of the people to conduct the affairs of state without fear or favour, malice or ill will. We accept our responsibilities with the clear understanding that national interests and the national good must take precedence over partisan and individual interests.

Mr. Speaker, in treating with these national interests, I wish to briefly put before this House an idea of our legislative agenda for this session. We MPs must look after the people of this country and so, during this term, we plan to implement certain measures to deal with crime. Whilst the police has been reporting lower levels of serious crime, we feel that we can do more. We notice the lawlessness in the country.

Just this week rival gangs were shooting up the streets in east Port of Spain in broad daylight, having little or no regard for human life. We need to have the anti-gang law enforced; enforced I say, Mr. Speaker, so as to deal with this increasing scourge in the country.

During this parliamentary term, I expect the hon. Attorney General to find additional ways to deal with the crime problem. It would seem that despite the measures already in place to deal with road safety, more needs to be done. Motorists continue to speed with impunity. Drivers continue to speak on cellphones whilst driving and so endangering the lives of others and so we see many lawbreakers.

As we enter another parliamentary session, I have asked the Minister of National Security and the Minister of Transport to take on the task of tackling this problem on the roads. Too many persons, especially young ones, are dying from either speeding or too much alcohol or from just being weary. Just last week Cabinet was asked to agree to the installation of speed trap cameras across the country to assist in reducing carnage on the roads. Mr. Speaker, I am advised that these cameras function well in the US and the UK with very great success.

Another issue we are very concerned with is that of health care and so we intend to step up in the coming year. We have already agreed to the construction of several hospitals, and only last week we announced that health care centre will be erected in Felicity. Mr. Speaker, Members of the public need to access health care from any part of the country and so it is our wish that this would become a reality soon.

Also, Mr. Speaker, for the agenda, the issue of constitutional reform remains one of the pledges that all MPs who were elected under the partnership ticket had subscribed to. Key amongst these were the ideas of fixed election dates, term limits for the Prime Minister and, three, the right of recall for MPs. We remain committed to deliver on these promises as we begin the Fourth Session of the Tenth Parliament of our Republic.

The hon. Minister of Legal Affairs spearheaded the consultations on constitutional reform throughout T&T and we await the report from that committee.

My Government intends to deliver on these promises before the next general election is held and I look forward to the support of parliamentary colleagues on all sides to help us deliver on these.

3.25 p.m.

The coming session is expected to be hectic. There are a number of matters expected to be laid before this honourable House. I take a moment to just mention a few of these. One is the Public Procurement (Disposal of Public Property) Bill.

Parliamentary Agenda
[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR SC]

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This Bill seeks to provide for a public procurement and disposal of public property in accordance with the principle of good governance, namely accountability, transparency and value for money.

Another Bill that we intend to lay in this session is the Jury (Amdt.) Bill, which seeks to address some of the major challenges to the jury system, to improve its efficiency. This Bill would create offences of juror misconduct and juror interference, restrict the publication of personal information of jurors, empower a judge to separate the jury after they retire and to provide for special juries in complex fraud matters. Also, on our agenda is the Insurance Bill, 2013, which seeks to provide a new framework for the insurance industry and to continue to provide for the regulation of privately administered pension funds plans.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity, and in closing I say this year we were honoured to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Treaty of Chaguaramas, establishing the Caricom. As Chair of the Caricom, it was our privilege to be part of the reenactment of that historic beginning during the annual Heads of Government conference and to recommit to our regional States our pledge to honour the tenets of good governance for all of our people.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, there being no other business, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to a date and a time to be fixed. [*Laughter*]

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Mr. Speaker: Before the question to the House for the adjournment, I would like to invite the hon. Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition to convey brief Emancipation and Eid greetings to the nation. I call on the hon. Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Hon. Speaker, with your leave, our Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism will make the statement. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism. Could you come forward, Sir?

The Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism (Hon. Dr. Lincoln Douglas): Mr. Speaker, we start this Fourth Session of the Tenth Parliament in the middle of

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the Emancipation holiday, which we celebrated yesterday, and a week before the observance of Eid-ul-Fitr. These celebrations reflect the diversity of our country and exemplify the unity that we continue to enjoy in Trinidad and Tobago.

In our annual commemoration of Emancipation Day, we recall the struggles and celebrate the triumphs of the ancestors of our African brothers and sisters, and pay tribute to their strength, perseverance and resilience. It is a time when we honour the achievements of their descendants whose traditions have become an integral part of the rich cultural mosaic that has made us a model among the community of nations.

Today, nearly two centuries later, still there are some pockets of human bondage and this remains a scourge that all freedom loving people must fight to eliminate. For tens of thousands worldwide, slavery remains very much alive, but we are fortunate to live in a country that cherishes and protects freedoms and individual rights. As citizens, we must all share in the responsibility to recognize, to appreciate, preserve our freedom for which our ancestors fought. Someone says the price of freedom is eternal vigilance. So we must never become complacent and let our guard down to open the door for those who do not respect freedom, as happened before as some tried to trample on the rights approximately 23 years ago.

In 1990, our protective forces stood up and defended our freedom, and today we offer our eternal thanks and gratitude for their valiant effort to defend our democracy. This year marked the 175th anniversary since the freeing of the slaves in 1838. There was much celebration throughout the country yesterday, as thousands walked the streets of Port of Spain to the Queen's Park Savannah.

I take this opportunity, also, to extend Eid-ul-Fitr greetings to our Muslim sisters and brothers on behalf of the Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Eid-ul-Fitr marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, which is an annual period of fasting that cleanses the body and the mind to demonstrate submission to God, to keep the mind focused on the spiritual plane.

The Eid holiday will be celebrated here in Trinidad and Tobago on Friday, August 09. It is my fervent prayer that Almighty God, Almighty Allah, will continue to shower blessings of peace, prosperity and happiness to all.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak for those of us on this side, and allowing me the

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opportunity to join with my colleagues on the other side at this time of year when we acknowledge two events which are important to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, at this time we in Trinidad and Tobago acknowledge Emancipation and celebrate with a holiday. It is a good time to reflect, Mr. Speaker, that slavery, out of Africa, is nothing new. Slavery predated the slave trade that brought our ancestors to the western world, but there were two things that made the African slaves so different. It was the scale of the event, the large numbers of people who were transposed from their comfort in their continent and, Mr. Speaker, the unspeakable brutality that was meted out to them here on these islands. And while those persons who left are not here today, slavery out of Africa, our kind of experience, still carries a burden because African slavery carried a mark of colour—they were black people.

And whereas the slaves of Asia, of the Middle East and Europe, whenever they were freed, Mr. Speaker, they could easily have assimilated into their communities and not be identified for who they were. African slaves, by virtue of their colour, continue in one way or the other to experience the hardships and recognition and discrimination of colour in Europe, in North America, in South America and elsewhere in the world.

So in a way, Mr. Speaker, as we acknowledge Emancipation, we must also acknowledge that the problem has not ended. And, Mr. Speaker, in Trinidad and Tobago, we today have seen the rise of a movement joining with the rest of the world requesting that some kind of recognition be given to persons who continue to suffer, the stamp of that experience of our ancestors. It might be a good time, Mr. Speaker, as we pay tribute and acknowledge our own origins, for the Government to pay attention to our own actions here in Trinidad and Tobago which would recognize that the presence of and the contribution of the slaves, and those who are descendants of slaves, could feel and acknowledge an emancipation in the way that the State's recognition of their rights and the opportunities are treated.

So, Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is viewed as a melting pot where many, many different types of persons have come here and we are all building a nation and as we acknowledge the persons and citizens who claim ancestry out of Africa, we recognize our responsibility to be one people building one nation. So, today I want to extend greetings on our behalf to all of Trinidad and Tobago, and ask us to acknowledge the significance, the full extent, of that significance of emancipation of all of us.

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As we continue, Mr. Speaker, to acknowledge the other components of our national make-up, I take the opportunity on behalf of all of us in this House, especially those on my side, to recognize Eid-ul-Fitr, which is coming up in a few days' time, where the Muslim community would have completed the fast and that preparation for going forward in greater communion with a spirit and to be better citizens as a result of the fast and of that commitment to serve one another and to be your brother's keeper.

So, again, I want to say, on behalf of all of us, to the Muslim community, Eid Mubarak. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to join the Members of the House of Representatives in offering Emancipation Day greetings to the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Yesterday, the nation celebrated Emancipation Day, 2013. In fact, it marked the 175th anniversary of emancipation in the English-speaking Caribbean.

Since the day was declared a national holiday, Emancipation Day celebrations have grown into a national festival with various activities, including art, culture, business and entertainment. However, Emancipation means more than a day of celebration and festivities. It represents the day in history, August 01, 1838, when African enslaved persons were declared free. There is much for our nation to learn from the observance of such a day.

Emancipation is a celebration of the strength of the human spirit. The day should be a time of reflection, a reflection on how far we have progressed and achieved as a nation since then. Nonetheless, one often wonders whether we have truly experienced emancipation in all its facets. Have we been emancipated mentally, for example? The end of enslavement did not signal an end of suffering. However, it was a step in the right direction for human rights and dignity. It is paramount that we safeguard the freedoms we enjoy today, freedoms which we fought hard to achieve.

Indeed, we must embrace our past, but look to our future. Now is not a time for any form of divisiveness. Our growth and development depend on us forging ahead together as one people and nation. I would like us to take time to reflect on a very important quote by the great Nelson Mandela, and I quote:

“...to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.”

On behalf of the Office of the Parliament, I join with the Government and the Opposition in offering Emancipation Day greetings to the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Happy Emancipation.

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I also wish to echo the sentiments that have been expressed by the Members of this honourable House in extending greetings to the Muslim community and the nation on the celebration of Eid-ul-Fitr which will be celebrated on Friday, August 09, 2013.

Eid-ul-Fitr, also known as festival of the breaking of the fast, is one of the most widely celebrated festivals in the Islamic calendar. It occurs after the sighting of the new crescent moon which signals the end of the month of Ramadan, the holy month of fasting.

As we join with our Muslim brothers and sisters in observing this auspicious occasion, let us not forget the underlying messages of spirituality, forgiveness, humility, unity and brotherhood. I wish you all a happy and holy Eid. Eid Mubarak.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 3.40 p.m.