



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Debates of the House of Representatives

3rd Session – 10th Parliament (Rep.) – Volume 14 – Number 1

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)**

THE HONOURABLE WADE MARK
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE NELA KHAN
DEPUTY SPEAKER

Wednesday 11th July, 2012

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

SESSION 2012—2013

VOLUME 14

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, July 11, 2012

1.30 P.M.

The House of Representatives having assembled, and it being the first meeting of the Third 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. 6 of 2012.

[L.S.]

By His Excellency Professor GEORGE
MAXWELL RICHARDS, T.C., C.M.T.,
Ph.D., President and Commander-in-
Chief of the Republic of Trinidad and
Tobago.

GEORGE M. RICHARDS

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, GEORGE MAXWELL RICHARDS, 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 Third Session of the Tenth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago shall be held and 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday 11th July, 2012, as the time at which the said Session shall commence.

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

Prayers

Wednesday July 11, 2012
of Trinidad and Tobago, at the
Office of the President, St.
Ann's, this 22nd day of June,
2012.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

ELECTION OF DEPUTY SPEAKER

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the office of Deputy Speaker has fallen vacant upon the appointment of Mr. Jairam Seemungal, Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, as a Minister of State. In those circumstances and pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) of the House of Representatives, I invite proposals for the Office of Deputy Speaker of the House.

The Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I wish to propose that Mrs. Nela Khan be elected to the office of Deputy Speaker of the House.

Seconded by Mr. Jairam Seemungal.

Mr. Speaker: Are there any other proposals? If there are no other proposals, I now declare Mrs. Nela Khan, Member for Princes Town, dully elected Deputy Speaker of the House. On behalf of all honourable. Members, I congratulate the newly elected Deputy Speaker of the House.

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

1.36 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

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

2.20 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

President of the Senate, Speaker of the House of Representatives, other Members of Parliament, specially invited guests, representatives of the media, other distinguished ladies and gentlemen:

I have the privilege of addressing Members of Parliament, once again, at a Ceremonial Opening, today marking the beginning of the Third Session of the

Tenth Parliament of our Republic. Let me give you the assurance that there is no need to brace yourselves, on the assumption that I will be tempted to be long-winded, this being, according to plan, the last time that such a privilege will be afforded me. I am told that in a multitude of words there is sin and I would not wish to be found guilty of desecrating this House, particularly in view of my role, as established in the Constitution, as Head of the Parliament, a fact that many citizens of our country do not know. The relevant information stated in Chapter 4, which deals with the Parliament, Part 1, section 39, is as follows:

“There shall be a Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago which shall consist of the President, the Senate and the House of Representatives.”

As is perhaps well known, I came from a background of academia, not the ivory tower that some people carelessly assume it to be, to serve as President of Trinidad and Tobago, “elected in accordance with the provisions of this Chapter”—that is to say Chapter 4 of the Constitution—“who shall be...Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces.” From March 17, 2003, when I first took the oath of office, I have come to understand, somewhat better, what that means, certain interpretations being subjected to some legitimate adjustment.

On occasion, during my still active sojourn in the Presidency, I have observed, with deep interest and have come to recognize, other persons' understanding of what it means to be President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. My conclusion is that there remains a large space for education on this matter, at all levels of our own society, in the outside world and on the part of visitors as well.

Some may say that I have the right to orate as I please, given the context, but I have come to realize that we have become very conscious of our rights, sometimes to the exclusion of all else. While not making light of entitlement and inalienable rights, particularly human rights and equal rights, we may want to consider them in the context of the collective, so that we may accelerate our advancement as a nation. And as I mention equal rights, I muse about equal opportunity and ask myself whether we, every single one of us, should not be more concerned than some of us seem to be, about equal opportunity. If that is achieved, in respect of all of us, then, what we do with our opportunity will be up to us and no one else can take responsibility for our success or failure.

Moreover, we need to remind ourselves that equal opportunity is not the domain of any individual or group in our diverse population. Decisions taken in this Parliament must be such as to ensure even-handedness and transparency in policies that affect the welfare of all our citizens. There must be equality of opportunity and merit must count above every other consideration.

2.30 p.m.

With this in mind, perhaps we need to be more conscious of the provisions of our Constitution. We should take the trouble to inform ourselves of what is, in fact, a contract between the people of this nation and our leaders. It is a contract that goes beyond the temporary high points of election drama that takes place from time to time. It is a contract that positions our people to require of our parliamentary and local government representatives, elected as well as appointed, that the decisions taken in our Parliament, our local government bodies, the Tobago House of Assembly and the execution of those decisions by state entities reflect the fulfilment of the promises that they make when they choose to offer themselves for public service.

The preamble of our Constitution remains valid and relevant to the aspirations of a country such as ours, whose people are known to have made outstanding contributions to the development of other countries. Some of them have much longer recorded histories than ours and are described as developed, a status that we are striving to achieve.

Waves of brain drain to these countries, which persist today, tell a story of many facets, which we ought not to ignore. We must guard against being parochial, but we must ask ourselves why our nationals would find fulfilment elsewhere. Is it by choice or because they have no other choice? All must be included in the process of nation-building and we must recognize that expertise resides in Trinidad and Tobago which can be given preference over foreign input. In the context of a less than healthy Treasury, this must be a consideration.

Every paragraph of the preamble contributes to expectations which, if assiduously pursued, can create the conditions necessary for the commonweal, enabling the people of this country, at whatever level, to experience a sense of ownership of this space and of belonging. It is normal to preserve what you own. What decisions are being taken in the Parliament, the highest law-making body in our land, to make Trinidad and Tobago more wholesome and attractive to its people?

What systems are in place to develop a people more educated concerning the functioning of this country and ways and means to make it better? This is not a flash in the pan exercise, but one that calls for measured decision-making with an eye on the future. But in looking ahead, we must be careful, in our quest for new things, not to discard the past and behave as if it did not exist. We will find that some decisions of the past were taken on solid foundations.

In this regard, I think of education. Some may say that there was a time when we were better educated, even though there was a certain measure of exclusivity. It may be well to examine this area and adjust appropriately, by the policy decisions that we take, so that we may not become altogether a more certified, rather than an educated people.

Be that as it may, recognition must be given to what successive administrations have done, over several years, to make education more accessible and we can congratulate ourselves that we are one of the very few countries in the world where education is free, from nursery to tertiary levels. Many things have to be done to make our systems more efficient and workable at all levels, and the education budget must reflect an understanding of this. If we get the education right, a number of positives will follow in other aspects of national development. But in our fixing of systems, we need to pay serious and honest attention to the quality of university education that we offer.

Recently, the discovery of a new particle with properties consistent with the Higgs boson and which has been described as the God Particle has been reported, and I am quite certain that this presents another opportunity for scientific innovation which we should seize. Except for the steel pan, we have been consumers rather than innovators and we must be careful not to miss out on getting in at the ground level of this new scientific exposure and here, university education matters.

We need to become more conscious of the fact that very serious work has been done and continues to be done at our regional institutions, the University of the West Indies, including its St. Augustine campus. To its credit, links have been forged, over the years, with some of the highest ranking institutions of higher learning internationally.

Ladies and gentlemen, there was a certain vision birthed when the University of Trinidad and Tobago was established, particularly in respect of science and technology, which is critical and UTT must do no less than the University of the West Indies. None of us, I am sure, would like to see our national university lose its relevance to the communities that it is intended to serve, as there is a preeminent place for universities in the scheme of national development. But this can only be preserved if we are ever mindful of the purpose of university education.

Our universities must also ensure that not every social value is measured in terms of technological achievement and, as I have said before, the traditional role of universities in examining philosophical and ethical questions, in critical

[HIS EXCELLENCY]

analysis of the social order and in fostering artistic expression, must be re-endorsed as they take on enhanced roles in orienting and training students for knowledge-based development. Critical analyses, to which I have referred, must be strengthened, especially in an atmosphere in which these achievements could easily be devalued.

To achieve success, the independence of the university must be untrammelled and independent thinking be allowed to flourish. In no way should the Treasury influence the direction of the university in a young nation such as ours. The intellectual and creative energy that the university must provide, in order to enhance the country's economic performance, cannot be compromised.

The university is not a place that can accommodate anything but the best professional behaviour in all its practices. Academic excellence can only be achieved in a climate of understanding clearly what the university is for and the seminal role that it must play in the sustainable development of any nation. There is, consequently, no room for partisan behaviour and personal preference in appointments at the highest levels of leadership at our university or at the level of academic staff. Ability is what matters and Governments and others concerned must ensure that academic autonomy is preserved.

2.45 p.m.

In the matter of compromise, I cast my mind to law and order which, over the past several years, have come under siege, in this country, to an unprecedented level. In addressing this, the highest law-making body in the land, I feel compelled to join with those who rue the obvious lawlessness that confronts us. This state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue, but, in working towards solutions, we must, on all sides, be reminded that zeal must not inform our behaviour, lest mixed signals be conveyed, if in any way due process appears to be eschewed. Reproach must not be allowed to impede good intention. There is no question but that joint police/army patrols have been playing a critical role in the fight against crime and in the maintenance of law and order in our country. However, in their modus operandi, there must be a clear demonstration of understanding of the chain of command, within both entities, with wisdom dictating the levels of involvement. In this context, the philosophy of speaking truth to power must apply.

On another matter, reproach must not find a place in the working of Parliament and, in this context, I am all for the independence of Parliament. I think that the time has come for such independence to be established, in every

aspect, so that the work of Parliament may be enhanced and be seen to be free of bias. And there is another area within our systems where independence must be preserved. I refer to the independent commissions established under the Constitution. I believe that everything possible should be done to ensure better working conditions for these commissions, which were established for good reasons, reasons which have not lost their validity. As I have mentioned before in this honourable House, consigning them to history is not a good option. They are guardians of our democracy.

Before closing, may I say that we should be deeply appreciative of those who serve in the Parliament of our nation. You do not have an easy task and I believe that this fact could not have been fully understood until you began to function as a parliamentarian. Your profession requires solid preparation. And I dare say that, contrary to Plato's bitter conclusion, I believe that there is a place in politics for men of conscience. Mercy is not easily dispensed here and perhaps it should not be sought, in this arena, which is more conducive to the stance of gladiators. But in all that you do, please be reminded that at the centre of your consciousness should be the reality that people are the reason why you are here, not opportunity.

I am thinking of the entire constituency of Trinidad and Tobago, of whatever creed, race or social condition, the retiree of whatever rank, including the Judiciary, who is no longer visible and perhaps living in penury or not far from it, having given outstanding service; the working poor who does not stand out as the indigent does; those relatively small organizations that may not have the clout of established non-governmental organizations but which need your help, in order to help others. And let us not forget those who create and provide jobs—companies, cooperatives and individuals—who must make their contributions to the Treasury, but must be recognized for what they do.

As I have made reference to the work being done in the Parliament of which, constitutionally, I am a part, I think of the process of election of a President of Trinidad and Tobago which is clearly set out in the Constitution. We have heard it said, repeatedly, that the President is above politics and quite separate in his sphere of operation from the Government and the Judiciary. No one can be sure how a President votes in national elections if he/she chooses to exercise this right. Yet, there are those who conveniently aver that the President is a creature of the Government in power. At this stage of our development, there can be no good excuse for continuing in this vein and, at age 50, I am sure that we can do much better than that. I therefore take this opportunity to thank the various administrations that have served, during my tenure, for the ways in which we were able to work together in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I

[HIS EXCELLENCY]

am sure that we were all afforded several opportunities for growth. I thank also the officers and staff of the Parliament, at all levels, for their dedication to duty and their cooperation with the Office of the President. I wish you all very well.

Finally, how do we rate ourselves in this golden anniversary? We have done some things right, as evidenced by the fact, inter alia, that we remain, politically, a sovereign state. We have far to go and we cannot say that the road ahead signposts any guarantees. Indeed, if the truth be told, there are many questions, which some may choose to circumvent, but there is no wisdom in that. We have preserved our democracy, but I cite a response reportedly given by a United States President to a citizen who asked what he was giving to the people, state benevolence being at the heart of the question. He said: "A Republic, if you will preserve it." I believe that we, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, should ponder this, as we move on from this significant landmark of 50 years. Will we preserve our Republic?

In seeking to answer that question, we may wish to consider, deeply and honestly, the first base of our Republican Constitution which recalls inter alia that:

"...The People of Trinidad and Tobago—

- (a) have affirmed that the Nation of Trinidad and Tobago is founded upon principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God, faith in fundamental human rights and freedoms, the position of the family in a society of free men and free institutions,...the dignity of the human person and the equal and inalienable rights with which all members of the human family are endowed by their Creator;"

3.00 p.m.

In the decisions that are taken in this Parliament, have we been ever mindful to uphold these principles and the others that are stated in the preamble? Are we as conscious of the dignity of the human person as we might be? Is there any room for the perception that modern-day slavery can flourish here and, on the other hand, are we insisting on productivity as a necessary element in the preservation of human dignity? Are we mindful of the need to turn around our lack of competitiveness in the global environment and conscious as to where that work must begin? We must take the hard look if we are to equip ourselves properly to manage the next half century of independent status.

I look forward to accelerated social revolution in our country and the eradication of social insecurity, as a direct result of the collaboration, in this

President's Address

Wednesday July 11, 2012

Parliament, of all who serve. I wish you all a most productive Session and thank you for your service to our Republic. At a personal level, I convey to you, your families and your loved ones best wishes for good success in your positive endeavours.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for the courtesy of your kind attention, and may God bless our nation! [*Applause*]

3.02 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

3.03 p.m.: *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 Third 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

Third Session of the Tenth Parliament

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for allowing us this opportunity to make a statement on behalf of the Government at this Third Session of the Tenth Parliament. I want to begin by thanking His Excellency the President for his advice, for his usual forthrightness, in giving his overview of the coming year in the life of our parliamentary democracy.

As hon. Members will know, His Excellency's address today is the last official one that he will make at a ceremonial opening of Parliament, in this his second term of office as President. Indeed, you will recall that His Excellency was elected by the Electoral College, first in 2003 and thereafter in 2008, so that his second term will come to an end in 2013.

There is no constitutional bar as far as I am aware and, indeed, there is absolutely no constitutional bar for a third term. The Government has taken no decision on this matter and, therefore, whilst His Excellency may have appeared to be saying this is his last address, I would say that no decision has been taken on that matter and that this is, indeed, only the last official statement in his second term of office.

Further, I am sure that His Excellency's deep interest in education, his long service to a great Republic and his dedication to citizens of our nation will keep His Excellency involved in our progress and development. Mr. Speaker, we offer His Excellency our sincerest gratitude for his decade of service. We thank him for his service to the great Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

As we herald the start of the Third Session of this Tenth Parliament, in a year when our nation heralds its Golden Jubilee of Independence, the Government has the pleasure of introducing new faces to our legislative arm, and so we want to welcome Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, Minister of Finance and the Economy [*Desk thumping*]; Sen. The Hon. Marlene Coudray, Minister of Gender, Youth and Child Development [*Desk thumping*]; Sen. The Hon. Jamal Mohammed, Minister of Communication [*Desk thumping*]; and Sen. The Hon. Ganga Singh, Minister of the Environment and Water Resources. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, many of these faces would be familiar to you as to many other Members in the House and in the public domain, and so I say respectfully, they do not require formal introduction, as each individual brings enormous knowledge and expertise which they have assured will be brought to bear on how we proceed with our vision for sustainable development.

To our new and returning hon. Members, the nation has placed significant responsibilities on their shoulders, and our citizens have high expectations of each and every one of us. These are both challenging and exciting times for those reposed with the responsibility of managing the affairs of a nation which is poised for greater achievements.

To those who have departed from our Parliament, but remain in service to the people of our country, may I extend to them the nation's sincerest gratitude for their very loyal and dedicated service in this Chamber and in the Parliament as a whole. Their joint contributions helped to place Government in a far better position than when we arrived two years ago, on a far more solid footing to now enter into another phase of progress to ensure that our nation prospers once again. And so, to our former Senators: Sen. Brig. John Sandy, Sen. Nicole Dyer-Griffith, Sen. Verna St. Rose Greaves and Sen. Danny Maharaj, we thank you for your contribution in the legislative process and to our progress.

As we move into this Third Session of the Tenth Parliament, indeed, reflection is most important in planning the way forward. Together we have all engaged in a number of debates. We have answered questions on time and to the best of our ability. We have argued aggressively at times, and we have also at times found

common ground where the Government and the Opposition have agreed on certain national issues.

The sacred tradition of parliamentary democracy continues to be upheld and protected by my Government, and among all of us as Members, passionately demonstrating in the way we advocate on behalf of citizens of our great nation. There are some who would say that in this Chamber we are engaged in a civilized form of war. I know my colleague on the other side nodded when His Excellency made some references as to the conduct in the Chamber. So, at all times, we uphold the best traditions and principles of parliamentary democracy. We advocate on behalf of citizens of our great nation.

Through our diligent efforts to abide by the demands and rules of Parliament in answering questions on time, in seeing debates through to the end, sometimes having doubles at some very late hours in the morning and bake and shark at very late hours—seeing these debates through to the end—upholding the values which underline our nationhood, we continue to try to set new standards for parliamentary democracy. This is why even in our zest to represent the interests of our citizens, we remain fully aware of a nation looking on at us, listening to us and many times holding us as exemplars of dignity and decorum.

As we begin this session of Parliament, therefore, I ask again that all hon. Members hold rigidly to their oaths, while at the same time remaining conscious of our responsibility to lead by example and conduct ourselves in a manner that will continue to earn the approval of our citizens. Even as we argue with great passion, we must remain conscious of the very great responsibility on our shoulders. Even as we disagree with vehement force, we must remain loyal to the expectations of our citizens to do what is right for our nation, indeed, as we uphold our oaths to do right to all manner of men.

Indeed, even as we hold rigidly to opposite sides of the political divide, at times we must summon the maturity and the courage to act in a manner which serves the national interest over partisan interest, as indeed His Excellency did point this out and guide us. We are fully committed to that route and pathway to development, that at all times we put the national interest above partisan interest.

Mr. Speaker, this year is a very auspicious year, a most remarkable year, as we turn 50 as an independent nation, and we have earned for ourselves a perception of progressive dynamism. Today, I want to recognize the father of our nation, the Hon. Dr. Eric Williams, who brought us from Independence into a Republic. [*Desk thumping*] We owe him a debt of gratitude. [*Laughter and*

Desk thumping] And so, 50 years later here we are, around the world, the majestic red, white and black has grown to become a symbol of innovativeness, creativity and an indomitable spirit of unity.

Mr. Speaker, if I may respectfully agree to disagree with His Excellency the President, when he said that apart from the steel pan there has been no innovativeness in Trinidad and Tobago, I respectfully disagree. Yes, the steel pan has been one, a symbol of innovativeness, the only acoustical musical instrument invented in that century, but Trinidad and Tobago is known throughout the world for innovativeness, creativity, the diversity of our people and, indeed, the harmony, the unity in diversity which represents Trinidad and Tobago. [*Applause*]

Everywhere I have travelled, as you have, hon. Speaker and others in this Chamber, and all of the people of other countries I have spoken with, they have expressed in clear and unmistakable terms that Trinidad and Tobago must feel a sense of pride, not only over the distance we have come, but also the manner in which we continue to march forward. We are what some may call “a young” but we are a highly experienced nation.

We have journeyed to the heights of achievements in sports and as our athletes go off to the Olympics now, we wish them the greatest of luck and may they do the best that they can to represent the red, white and black. [*Applause*]

We have seen achievements in sports, in academics and in various areas of professional expertise. We have triumphed against forces which attempted to unseat our democratic traditions. We have given music to the world, and we could find every kind of music in our land. We have set standards for how political stability can be maintained, even in the most hostile battles as we saw the change from one administration to the next peacefully in this land. So, we have a lot to be proud of, and there is so much more, but I will not take up too much of the Parliament’s time. We will speak at another occasion.

As our great nation, in a year which commemorates our resilience, commemorates an admirable national character, we must be bold enough to acknowledge our strengths whilst we also acknowledge our weaknesses, and we must not only dwell on the weaknesses, we must celebrate and lift ourselves and lift our nation with our strengths and achievements. [*Desk thumping*]

It is for these reasons I want to express that whilst I agree we must do so as we celebrate our strengths with humility, we must also do so with a level of pride in our country, because if we are not proud first, then there will be no one else left to be proud, and so we celebrate strengths, we take pride in this great nation, this great Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is for these reasons I wish to express the solemn hope that even if we cannot agree, we disagree in a manner which still commands the respect of all citizens and is befitting of a parliamentary standard, which must continue to stand strong and proud long after we are gone, because when we sit in this Chamber, I am very much aware of the fact that we represent the sum total of our nation's aspirations and hopes; a nation which has come to a point of commemoration, but one which also recognizes that the accomplishments of history place on it demands for further progress.

Mr. Speaker, as Prime Minister, it is my intention to make our democracy much stronger than we found it two years ago. I will do this with my team by acknowledging not so much the power that is in our hands, but rather the responsibility which rests on all our shoulders.

In taking our responsibility seriously, our legislative agenda will see areas of specific and particular focus as we intensify our war on crime and solidify the institutional processes and policies aimed at protecting the lives and well-being of our nation's children. We will also push forward with our commitment to reform the criminal justice system and to introduce further measures to enhance the capacity of the protective services to detect, solve and prevent crimes.

On our legislative agenda, I want to take the opportunity to just itemize some of these. We have had several pieces of ground-breaking legislation within the last two sessions, and there will be a continued concentration on legislation dealing with security and law enforcement to add to what has already been put into place through the Office of the Attorney General, through the Ministry of Justice and through the Ministry of Legal Affairs.

Indeed, we would look forward now to the Private Security Bill as we add to the forces, the protective services, those engaged in the private security firms in Trinidad and Tobago. We will bring those Bills for discussion. We will move forward to deal with areas of penal reform because, as you may know, we have one of the highest rates of revolving door syndrome, recidivism, where persons who have been committed to prison are the ones who come back out and continue through the revolving door, and so penal reform is exceedingly important.

So, whilst we try to prevent crime at all levels through prevention and then through the law enforcement, offender management is very vital. This is why I have placed the prison system under the Ministry of Justice. Once a person has been charged, the justice system kicks in right down until that person is convicted and then leave, so penal reform and updated prison rules must also be broadened.

In the area of energy, Mr. Speaker, for the legislative agenda, there are the extractive industries transparency initiatives. With respect to the environment, a

Statement by Minister

Wednesday July 11, 2012

[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

newly created Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources which hit the ground running immediately, dealing with led poisoning, dealing with—

Hon. Member: Turtles!

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Turtles, and many others. [*Laughter*] I am sure the Minister of the Environment and Water Resources will deal with the issue of the turtles that arose yesterday.

3.35 p.m.

In the area of the environment, we want to bring the long awaited Beverage Container Bill; air pollution rules; with respect to the economy, legislation dealing with areas of growing the economy. Indeed, it is very clear we must continue, Mr. Speaker, to grow the economy to create jobs to reduce poverty and therefore also to work on reducing crime. That would be the core of our delivery systems in this new session.

In sports we look forward to anti-doping legislation. In transport we look forward to the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act. We look forward to the use of cameras and video recording devices to detect errant driving, the use of modern speed detecting devices and also we look forward to the introduction of speed guns and speed detecting cameras, regulating the use of mobile devices whilst driving and the regulation and control of motor vehicle emissions. These, Mr. Speaker, are just some of them. The hon. Attorney General will bring to this honourable House details of the legislative agenda; shed light on the multi-pronged attack on crime and our efforts to grow the economy, create jobs, reduce poverty and indeed fight the runaway crime.

We all persevere with our agenda of change. We do so notwithstanding our detractors or perennial critics. Indeed it is said, Mr. Speaker, change is difficult to accept, and that comes from the very highest level to the lowest levels in our society. Change is difficult to accept, but change we must.

I say, our focus remains on ensuring victims of crime are afforded swift justice, the perpetrators of crime are made to feel the full weight of the law, and protective services are afforded the institutional and physical resources to carry out their duties. We also pursue with invigorated focus, the important issues of social safety, the empowerment of citizens through ownership, equal opportunity and social justice of which His Excellency spoke so eloquently about this afternoon. Equal opportunity and social justice, we will continue with our thrust

in these areas. We will continue with respect to regional and international trade and diversification of our economy.

Mr. Speaker, as I close, I say the people of our country are most interested in sustainable solutions to keep us moving forward from recovery into prosperity. This is why even an impatient and expectant population continues to appreciate and acknowledge that our mission to stabilize the economy has been achieved, and the right foundation has been set by the hon. Winston Dookeran. Now the time has come to restore the full strength and capacity of our economy ensuring that each and every citizen stands to contribute and benefit not just a privileged few; indeed, Mr. Speaker, equal opportunity and social justice.

When the national budget for 2013 is presented in this House, the nation will have a very clear view of the reform agenda we have undertaken, how we have progressed and how we intend to move beyond the corner which the IMF recently acknowledged that we were able to turn.

Having come now into the third year of our term, you would note that the Government itself has undergone some transformation. For us to continue being the leaders of change, may we always be responsive to demands for change. It is for this reason that the Cabinet has given itself this space to continuously and critically assess itself and adapt to an increasingly dynamic environment.

The recent Cabinet reconfiguration has assembled experience more appropriately with talent, and the determination to deliver on these factors have enhanced our emphasis on achieving our vision of sustainable development. As we move forward into our term of Government, we therefore proceed with greater confidence as well as a very clear understanding that the people of our nation demand more, demand better and are in a great hurry for progress.

As Member of Parliament elected to serve our citizens, it is my hope that even as we maintain the energetic cut and thrust at adversarial politics we all maintain at the core of our deliberations the good and well-being of the people we serve. Mr. Speaker, the people of our nation have placed their faith and trust in us, and I for one, as well as all the members of the Government, have every intention of living up to our responsibilities. As Members, we solemnly swore to uphold our Constitution, to implement policies to benefit the people of our nation and to build a social and economic machine to secure all of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, hon. Members, today as we formally begin this session of Parliament under the spotlight of a grand commemoration of our nation's proud history, I solemnly swear to continue fulfilling my responsibility to the best of my

[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

ability for the benefit of all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. May I also take this opportunity to thank your good self and members of the staff of the Parliament—the Clerk and others—for the excellent arrangements made in this temporary home which houses us for this special ceremonial opening of the Parliament today. I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing, Land 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 to be fixed.

Mr. Speaker: Before putting the question to the House for the adjournment, I am not too sure when we are going to return and the 50th anniversary of our Independence is going to be coming shortly. I would like to take this opportunity to call on the hon. Prime Minister.

Hon. Prime Minister, would you like to speak on the occasion as we begin this big commemoration of our 50th Anniversary, followed by the hon. Leader of the Opposition?

Fiftieth Independence Anniversary Greetings

The Hon. Prime Minister (Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Thank you very much, Hon. Speaker. I understand Members question that I spoke already. I thought we could speak in this House when the hon. Speaker gives us the opportunity, so I am not usurping the Standing Orders. I am very much in keeping with those Standing Orders. Hon. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak, and I trust we can all speak again and not only once upon a time in this House. I thank you.

Hon. Speaker has intimated to us as we may not be sitting prior to August 31 in this venerable Chamber that we would use the opportunity to bring greetings on the occasion of the 50th golden jubilee anniversary celebration of our independence. I do so on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and, indeed, on my own behalf to wish Members of this Chamber the best that we can be in this special year as we continue to grow on our strengths to take the nation forward. To members of the public, our citizens, we join with you in really celebrating a remarkable milestone in our nation's history.

To some, 50 years is very young, very short in the life of a nation, but we have gone on a journey over the last 50 years that is second to none in the development of any nation. I want to congratulate again the founding fathers of our nation; the

late hon. Dr. Eric Williams who took us on that pathway, took us into independence; to all those who were the Constitution framers in 1962; those Members of the Opposition then; Members of the then Government where Dr. Eric Williams, Hon. Capildeo who all went up to Marlborough House and came back and created this independent nation, we want to thank them for their vision and their foresight to have taken us to independence.

I made the point that there are nations today in the Caribbean, like we were, who are still dependent territories. Whilst it is many nations went forward into independence in the Caribbean, within the Caricom today, there are others who have remained dependent on England and are still colonies. So it was a remarkable achievement for the Government of the day together with the Opposition, in 1962 to craft a charter to found a nation for us to become independent.

Again, we thank them all. We will continue, Mr. Speaker, in our celebrations throughout the rest of this year. There are several activities that have been earmarked and scheduled to take place. We look forward to joining with all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago as we celebrate this great golden jubilee anniversary celebration.

Mr. Speaker, if I may, with your permission, thank you very much and to say may God continue to bless the very great nation that is Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There are very few people in the world who can do what we are setting out to do here in Trinidad and Tobago, and that is to celebrate the birth and a 50th anniversary of a nation having been present at the birth and being present at the golden jubilee.

Most of the world's people would live in countries which have been established or created or fashioned well before the time of those who are alive today, but here in Trinidad and Tobago in our 50th year, a significant proportion of our population shares the excitement that I shared in 1962 when we became a nation.

It is easy, Mr. Speaker, to be hard on ourselves when we fall short of perfection, but nation building is an incomplete process. Of course, as we aspire to attain perfection there are always shortcomings, and there is always work to be done and challenges to be overcome.

In our 50th year, Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding all that would have been said, expected or done, Trinidad and Tobago can feel proud that the confidence that we expressed in ourselves to our colonial masters in 1962 was not misplaced. In our 50 years as a nation, we have moved in the area of education from a few scholarships in a few schools to a nation populated by edifices of all kinds, and as people who have taken for granted education, including free education.

There was a time, Mr. Speaker, in this country where basic diseases—some of which are now eradicated completely around the world—ravaged this country, but as an independent nation we have been able to provide our people with a standard of health care which is better than most in the world and as good as any. We do have, in the dispensing of that health care, nationals who are equal to their counterparts anywhere.

Mr. Speaker, in that 50-year period we have built an economic infrastructure—and I refer specifically to Point Lisas which is the envy of many, and, of course, we can be proud that it is managed largely by the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We have built physical infrastructure in this country that has changed the face of Trinidad and Tobago. We no longer go around Tobago by boat in the coastal steamer service and we can drive comfortably to most corners of our country; physical infrastructure. The human development of Trinidad and Tobago falls in the category of those countries which have done very well, and if we compare ourselves with others who got independence at about the same time that we got ours, we have not done too badly and some did not do nearly as good as we did.

We have had our people go on the world stage and compete and, of course, present us with medals of gold, silver and bronze when others aspire only to make the finals.

3.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, if there is a yardstick by which we are to measure our success, I would like to suggest that we use a yardstick which compares how we have done with respect to how our parents have been. And if we have done better than our parents, then we are making progress, but we should take no comfort in that and stay there. We must make sure and have the confidence to know that our children will do better than we are doing, and that will tell us that we are making the kind of progress that we set about to make in 1962.

So, I hope that as we can also identify challenges we did not measure up to, because as we have had our highs and we have had our lows—more highs than

lows—I hope that the celebration in the 50th anniversary would not be recorded as one of the lows.

I look forward, Mr. Speaker—it is not too late—for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago to come together as one people to celebrate this milestone of 50 years of independence of all our people built by all our people for all our people.

I wish the people of Trinidad and Tobago on behalf of my colleagues on this side of the House, and all those we represent in Trinidad and Tobago, home and abroad, a happy golden anniversary.

Mr. Speaker, may God bless us all. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I would like to join the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in bringing greetings on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of independence of Trinidad and Tobago. Over the last 50 years, we have grown as a nation and as a people. This growth has manifested itself in our education system, our technological advancement and our energy industries, just to name a few. In addition, our cultural diversity and tolerance for each other's rights and freedoms is another example of our fantastic growth since our independence.

The first responsibility that was devolved upon us as a nation by our first Prime Minister was to safeguard, defend and promote our democracy. Although we are yet to find a better form of governance, our parliamentary system of democracy continues to persevere despite many shortcomings.

We have had several changes in Government as a young nation, and we continue to have a very strong and stable system of democracy. Today, we continue our forward stride toward the city of greater harmony, unity in diversity and equal opportunity and justice for all. This future becomes even brighter as we witness the younger generation in our society demonstrating a greater interest, via social media, in the governance of our young nation.

The Parliament is currently in the process of implementing and executing a series of programmes in celebration of this memorable occasion. These programmes will include public exhibitions and television documentaries which will depict and highlight our long, and at times, difficult journey toward nationhood. Details of these and other events will be made available to ensure that there is maximum participation.

Fiftieth Independence Greetings
[MR SPEAKER]

Wednesday July 11, 2012

On behalf of all hon. Members of the House, I wish each citizen of Trinidad and Tobago a happy 50th anniversary of independence.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 3.54 p.m.