

# Inaugural Speech of H.E. Dr. John Freeman, Governor of the Turks and Caicos Islands

17 October 2016

Your Honour the Speaker, Her Ladyship the Chief Justice, Honourable Premier, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition and the House of Assembly, Police Commissioner, Distinguished guests and visitors, thank you for having received me - and my wife - with such grace and warmth this morning. Thank you Chief Justice for having sworn me in earlier in this ceremony. And thank you Mr Speaker for having given me the opportunity to address this House of Assembly today.

It is indeed a great honour to be appointed as HM The Queen's representative in the Turks and Caicos Islands and a great privilege to serve my term as Governor, your Governor, of these beautiful Islands. TCI is much blessed: it has been endowed generously by Providence with a glorious environment and with some wholly unique flora and fauna. It has achieved a great deal through the determined efforts and labours of its talented people. In short TCI has been given much and has gained much over the years and has much therefore to protect and sustain.

I have read and heard a great deal about the history and attainments of these Islands, your Islands. I want however to learn more about TCI directly, by engaging with all of those who live here, by looking and exploring for myself, but, above all, by listening. By listening to the stories and experiences, the cares and concerns and the hopes and aspirations of everyone for whom these Islands are home.

When I remarked to someone recently that this was a good time to be coming to TCI, he responded with a broad smile, that it is always a good time to come to TCI. And I should mention that this is not my first visit to TCI, though my last visit was short and a long time ago. But the memory of that visit has stayed with me and when I was given the opportunity to come here as Governor, I recalled vividly the warmth - in every sense of that word - of that earlier visit and I did not hesitate to accept.

I hope all of you in this House of Assembly today and the many others across the Islands, will find me a straightforward person, and that you will come to view me as a friend of TCI and of all you who live here. I intend as a small act of outreach to tell people something about myself in a short personal video I hope to post on the Governor's Office website in the near future.

In order to help me in the discharge of my duties I will be meeting all those among you exercising office and authority in TCI, and, especially importantly, with the Premier (for whose words of welcome I am grateful and on which I will reflect) and other members of the government, and also with the Leader of the Opposition (for whose words of welcome I am also grateful and will reflect upon). I will be developing a wider programme of meetings and visits over the coming weeks and months, including visits to all the main Islands, and meetings with leaders in Civil Society in all its many forms. I will be seeing at first hand the work of the

Public Service in all its variety, including the Royal Turks and Caicos Police Service, whose work touches all our daily lives and enables us to go about our business and lead our lives securely. Indeed the work of the Public Service as a whole is crucial to the efficient functioning of any territory and community.

In my long career as a public servant in the UK and overseas and in UN-system International Organisations, I have travelled widely. In the course of those travels I have sometimes visited countries where the Public Service was, frankly, weak; where the Rule of Law (including occasionally, the Police Service) was uncertain or partial. These are important matters: the independence of the judiciary, the independence, competence and integrity of the Public Service (including proper financial oversight) are not acquired quickly or easily. Such independence under the Law is hard won, and, unless nurtured with care, can all too easily and speedily, be lost.

In TCI these aspects of good governance have also been hard won. I am sure precisely because of this that they are especially cherished. For good governance is not something desirable just in theory, it is vital in practice. Good governance earns a good reputation in the wider world. And such a reputation serves in turn to encourage stability and predictability, both of which are conducive to enhanced international investment, including through tourism, and thereby to enhanced prosperity for citizens.

I alluded earlier to Civil Society, two words which can sound a little opaque as to what exactly they mean. But they represent everything beyond the Public Service and the Government, and, even from what I read before coming here as well as from what I have already heard, you in these Islands have a lively and vital Civil Society. Whether in terms - just by way of examples - of environmental stewardship and protection, of care for the Islands' heritage, of the role of Christian Churches, or of youth organisations like the Girl Guides and Cadets, it is apparent that TCI is a place where people converse and work together for a common good. I look forward - including with the support of my wife - to exploring this rich diversity of local groups and organisations, and, where thought helpful, to offering support and interest.

I have mentioned the common good which leads me also to speak of common concerns and challenges in the contemporary world, from which none of us are exempt. As a poet once remarked: "when we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to the whole world". This unavoidable interdependence is ever more the case in an age of globalisation. But countries and communities interlinked with their regions and beyond, as I believe TCI is, have much to gain if they work with the grain of globalisation and not against it. In an Island State far from here where I once served as a diplomat, i.e. Singapore, all of us can see what has been achieved with what seemed at first very constrained resources. We should in my view never underestimate what can be achieved, if it is approached in the right way and with intelligent determination. Singapore taught me the importance of ambition, hard work and fundamental optimism.

In the achievement of continued economic growth and prosperity, the role of the business community here in TCI and internationally, is vital. In a number of previous professional

positions, including when in Singapore, I have had responsibility for the promotion of trade and investment. I hope I may be able, in a modest and supportive way, to draw on that experience and engage helpfully with and for the business community in these Islands and even externally. I look forward to learning more about what TCI has achieved already and about plans for future growth. I will ensure that in my programme of upcoming meetings and activities, I make myself available to members of the business community, the wealth creators.

Of course some wider developments are, I know, of particular interest, even concern, to TCI and other OTs at this time. I have in mind particularly Brexit, the UK's decision to exit the European Union. Understandably this raises issues of concern to TCI and other OTs and its implications will be an issue to be discussed at the next Joint Ministerial Council (JMC) in London at the end of this month, a meeting both the Premier and I will attend. Already however, the U.K. Government has stated that it will fully involve the Overseas Territories in accordance with their constitutional relationships with the U.K., to ensure that all of their interests are taken properly into account.

I have already touched on aspects of my role as Governor. However let me say also in this context of external challenges as well as more broadly, how I see my own role. I want to work closely with the TCI government, our government. I want to contribute to problem-solving initiatives of benefit to TCI. I want to be a co-operative partner going forward, listening more than talking. I want to help find common sense answers to matters of concern to these Islands. And, of course and in all humility, I realise and start from the recognition that the people of these Islands know the kind of future they want to have for themselves and for their families; and ultimately it is for them to decide what future they want and for them to work for that future. As your Governor I want to contribute positively to the attainment of that future.

Mr Speaker, let me summarise: my goal as Governor, as your Governor, is one of service. As others do, I will play my part under the Constitution. For all of us who exercise authority in TCI, including not least me as your Governor, it is our privilege, each of us according to our defined roles, to serve the larger good (including the human rights, not least of the most vulnerable) of all those for whom TCI is home, today and also tomorrow. And my last point is important: we serve not only today's needs, but, in so far as we can divine them, tomorrow's too. We who occupy positions of authority under the Constitution are guardians, whether we are here for a season or for a lifetime, of the best interests of those whom we are set in place to serve. I vouch today that will be my own goal. And may God continue to bless TCI and all who live here.

Mr Speaker and everyone present, thank you all for your attention.