

53rd Independence Day Address

By

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It is only 53 years that the red white and black flag, a symbol of the independent Nation of Trinidad and Tobago, was hoisted and the Union Jack lowered to establish irrevocably our sovereignty and the right to forge our future and determine our destiny. As a relatively young Nation, we have displayed worldwide prowess and the power and dynamism of our people through academia, business, food, music, our international persona and our defining cultural “Calaloo” are assured, taking our rightful place on the world stage. This is not to say, that we have not as a Nation, sometimes stumbled along the way. In a relay race, the runner sometimes stumbles but notwithstanding even when we have, we did not lie prostrate and we have in some measure learnt from our mistakes, the bruises with the panacea.

Independence is not meant for us to be isolationist in vision, indifferent to world issues and crises and supreme in our individual action. An aspect of independence that is often disregarded is our interdependence among all things great and small. Our wealth, natural and human, does not make us impervious to the vagaries of international politics and economics and of course, Mother Nature. We are interdependent in a way never before experienced by our forefathers.

Globalization has forced us to reinterpret an independence that recognizes the need in us to go beyond our insular concerns and geographical boundaries and that interdependence, is critical for the survival of any progressive Nation. A gentle reminder of this, is a statement of Martin Luther King who said, “No individual or nation can stand out boasting of being independent. We are all interdependent.”

We must not therefore, only simply spare a thought or a prayer for our Caribbean brothers and sisters in Dominica who suffered great loss of life and worrisome displacement from hurricane Erika — a small country with a small population that makes the loss of some 29 lives severe and heart wrenching. The frivolity and happiness that we feel and experience on this wonderful day, must however give way to sober reflection how as a member of the Caribbean community we

can help Dominica and each other. We must therefore come to their aid in a meaningful way because as an independent and interdependent Nation, we must always be involved in the business of humanity. This must always be a part of our individual lives, blessed as we are, with natural resources and being historically a safe haven for ships, yachts and persons fleeing from the threat of hurricanes.

Our post-colonial period has endeared to itself a philosophy of materialism with little regard to development of the inner man and woman. Money must not rule this town of ours but rather character, integrity and decency. It was Pope Francis who admonished us of a cancer that is eating away the human fabric and very decency of society worldwide and this equally applies to us. I refer to what Pope Francis articulated, as the "Terrorism of Gossip". Kindness, compassion and decent conduct are the hallmarks of a society on the road to true progress and I am confident that we can get there if we really try. Citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, the "Terrorism of Gossip" must be eradicated from our lives and informed, genuine and compassionate discussion must rule our national dialogue and interaction. We must not become a society in adult distress and we must neither encourage nor create an environment of deliberate exaggeration, misinformation and untruths in our daily lives. We are one. Regrettably, what is politically correct is often the greatest impediment to national progress. We must always put country first. Remember always when you do good, it feels good.

At this juncture of our history, it is very relevant to reinforce the words of our first Prime Minister Dr Eric Williams in his 1962 Independence Address to the Nation when he stated with analytical clarity, "Problems of difficulties there will be. These are always a challenge to a superior intelligence and to strength of character. Whatever the challenge that faces you, from whatever quarter, place always first that national interest and the national cause."

Our accomplishments are myriad, so too are our challenges as we participate, voluntarily or involuntarily, in this certainty that is globalisation. The challenging economic setbacks that we face are not unique to us, but common to the world. The key to countering these global, domino-effect type issues, for example, the decline of oil prices or the devaluation of the Chinese yuan, will be for each of us, to do our part in being responsible citizens to not only Trinidad and Tobago, but also to this global village we call home. It starts with being environmentally conscious of the carbon footprint we leave on this planet every time we indulge in excess; with being financially, socially and economically responsible to each other and our country; with contributing in a meaningful and honest way to the economic workforce of Trinidad and Tobago- an honest day's work for an honest day's pay; and by being our brother's keeper. It will do us all some good, even as we become an increasingly modernised nation, to pay homage to the values of our forefathers and return to the era of good manners, duty and common good.

It is a time of celebration, a time to recognize the benefits of the struggles of our forefathers and the positives that we presently enjoy. It is a time to reflect on this rewarding journey of 53 years. It is an occasion to rejoice in all of our National accomplishments which we have achieved by the Grace of God.

On behalf of my wife Reema, my son Christian, my daughter Anura and I, we wish every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago a Happy Independence 2015 and do have a blessed and safe Independence Day.