

**54<sup>TH</sup> INDEPENDENCE DAY ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY  
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PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

**31 August 2016**

Fifty-four years as an Independent Nation, is indeed cause for celebration but also a necessary time for critical reflection and introspection. On this Independence Day, we ought to engage a deeper appreciation of who we are as a Nation, what we have, where we need to go and what must be done to fully realise the aspirations of our burgeoning democracy. The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has always been a Nation of immeasurable potential.

Independence must not simply be a commemoration of the struggle for independence. We honour that struggle by bridging the racial, political and religious divides that sometimes impede our true potential as a Nation. To be truly independent, means to unshackle ourselves from bondage. It means invariably, that critical, objective, impartial and informed judgment must be engaged at all times when assessing and tackling our national situations, problems and issues. Real genuine Independence demands that our National dialogue and interactions have at the very core, the language and acts of empathy, compassion and kindness to all manner of men, women and children, regardless of race, class, socio-economic status or religion. Genuine inclusivity must therefore become an important feature of our daily lives.

It will do us well to recall at this defining moment in our history, what our first Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams, stated in his Independence Day address to the Nation in 1962, “All that is our democracy, to which I call upon all citizens to dedicate themselves on this, our Independence Day. This is what I meant when I gave the nation its slogan for all time: Discipline, Production, Tolerance. Indiscipline, whether individual or sectional, is a threat to democracy. Slacking on the job jeopardises the national income, inflates cost and merely sets a bad example. The medieval churchmen had a saying, that to work is to pray. It is also to strengthen our democracy by improving our economic foundation.”

It is a feature of our uniqueness as a Nation that we are multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious. Not too many other countries of the world can boast of such a rich tapestry, such that we have been bestowed the title of “the Rainbow Nation of the World”, both by His Holiness Pope John Paul II and Bishop Desmond Tutu. As the Rainbow Nation of the World, we epitomise genuine harmony in diversity. Indeed, the obvious truth about rainbows is that there can be no rainbows without rain, much in the same way that we cannot achieve success and true progress as a Nation without the occasional stumble, fall and disappointment. Persevere we must.

It is our indomitable Trinbagonian spirit and love for each other and country that allow us to rise when we fall. Our patriotism must neither be selective, convenient nor transient. It equally translates to our triumphs, as to our setbacks. No great Nation was ever built on success alone. Such is a fallacy; an empirical anomaly. As a Nation, we have hurdles to cross. The key is to recognise and confront them and galvanise the appropriate inclusive solutions. To fortify the celebration of our Independence, we must display unstinting patriotism, even when the runner stumbles.

We must remember always that this Independence that we gloriously celebrate is historically grounded in a deep sense of patriotism, and so, in the spirit of patriotism, we must salute our Rio 2016 athletes for their own representation and patriotism at the Games, for their grit, determination and heart.

As a Nation, we have come a long way. That seed of Independence that was planted 54 years ago has borne many fruits of economic, social and infrastructural development. To each of my fellow citizens, remember always that we are unique and strong in our heritage; a vibrant callaloo of cultures; a nation, geographically small but powerfully impacting both the Caribbean and the world at large.

This Anniversary is not a celebration of just 54 years as an Independent Nation, but 54 years as a potent force on the world stage. Ours is a nation that is a pillar of strength, Caribbean resilience and leadership and a veritable intellectual factory.

To all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, at home and abroad, happy 54<sup>th</sup> Independence and may Almighty God bless this great Nation.