

**A MESSAGE FROM HIS EXCELLENCY ANTHONY THOMAS
AQUINAS CARMONA ORTT, SC PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC
OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO ON THE OCCASION OF OUR 55TH
ANNIVERSARY OF INDEPENDENCE 2017**

31 August 2017

From Crown Colony to Independent State, freedom for all, self-sustainability, self-actualisation and the right to forge a national destiny were the driving forces that inspired the great, brave revolutionaries to lobby and advocate for our self-governance. From the trenches of slavery and Indentureship, we found strength and unity in each other's struggle; the common denominators that forged the catalyst for our very freedom. This great Nation of ours has been built on the hard work, dedication, tenacity, sacrifice and perseverance of its talented sons and daughters. We need to therefore rededicate ourselves to that transformational value system and philosophy.

Today and every day, we must strive for excellence. We must cultivate hope that we can overcome all adversities as a Nation and further foster a National consciousness that makes us believe that great things are possible, even for as tiny a Nation State as this great Nation. Esteemed Nobel Laureate VS Naipaul in his novel "A Bend in the River" encouraged, "After all, we make ourselves according to the ideas we have of our possibilities." In our 55 years of Independence, we have been able to establish and maintain democratic processes and institutions, a buoyant educational system girth by the regional institution, the University of the West Indies (UWI) and the magic of great sporting achievements. Unrivalled access to education is an enviable feature and distinctive hallmark of an independent Trinidad and Tobago.

Our attainment of Independence resulted in the development of our very own national symbols that are physical reminders of our identity, culture and our collective consciousness. As we celebrate our independence in true Trinbagonian patriotism, we must culture a society with absolute regard and respect for all our national symbols. In this regard, I make a clarion call to protect our national flora and fauna, especially our national birds. One such beautiful symbol is the Scarlett Ibis in flight or nesting on the mangrove trees of the Caroni Swamp. There must be no compromise in our fight to protect the Scarlett Ibis. Ours is a country therefore, that must guard against starving ourselves of the fundamentals of patriotism. Patriotism has a formidable utility. It is the driving force of a country's character and a Nation's conscience.

Here in Trinidad and Tobago, we celebrate our differences and we rejoice in diversity, simply because we understand that it is our differences that make us 'Trinbago'. Those

who forsake the apparentness of diversity are ignorant to the fact that if we are all the same then the same disappointments, the same challenges, the same obstacles can devour us whole. We must enable each other and make our diversity our forte on the world stage. In the quest for real, genuine inclusivity, we must be informed rather than remain ignorant about the needs and aspirations of persons less fortunate, particularly persons with disabilities. Individually and collectively, we must continually ask ourselves, how as a Nation will we be judged? Will we be judged by how we treat the strong and the powerful among us? No, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, we will be judged by how we treat and care for the weak, the disadvantaged, the marginalized and the voiceless.

Occasions such as Independence, afford us the opportunity to recall and renew our individual and collective patriotism to our Nation's watch words, Discipline, Production, Tolerance. They mandate us to take stock of ourselves; that we must reach for a higher morality that triggers compassion, mercy and forgiveness; of a work ethic that works; of a rejection of social, political and economic hostility. These Watch Words are established to foster in us a way of life that embraces the tenets of mediation, civility, sacrifice, selflessness and neighbourly love. We are each tasked with the responsibility of co-existing in a harmonious Trinidad and Tobago, in which doing the right thing is the right thing to do, at all times, without fear of victimization, bias or prejudice.

Even if we fall short of this profound mandate, our national resilience must be so embedded that it provokes an inalienable understanding that when the proverbial runner stumbles, or even falls, he/she must be encouraged and supported to get back up. It is with great pride that I salute the remarkable achievements of all our Paralympians and our athletes, especially gold medalist, Akeem Stewart and the 'never say die' quartet 4x 400 meters gold medalists at the World Championships in London, together with the astounding victory of the West Indies Cricket Team against England a few days ago. These athletes have all become our lightning rods in our social and human darkness. This imposing display of youth success and prowess on the international stage is a timeless and timely gift to a Nation celebrating Independence. Our athletes deserve nothing less than the best in good times and in bad times and our patriotism demands that we must never be fair-weathered supporters.

The celebration of our Independence must as well be grounded in global awareness and empathy for the afflictions suffered by our international neighbours. An Independent Nation must be grounded in a firm appreciation for regional and global interdependence that fosters progress and genuine acts of benevolence, compassion and mutual respect among all persons and Nations, great and small.

For us, being independent should not mean wrapped in a cocoon of only 'Trinbago' consciousness; we must not be isolated people, wrapped up in ourselves and not be too interested in the world outside as Naipaul reminds us. Fellow citizens, we must be so

fiercely proud of our 'Trinbago' values and identity that we become our own ambassadors to the world. We must continue to play a meaningful role in regional, hemispheric and world affairs so that our celebrated values of hospitality, tolerance and life-affirmation, forged in the march to Independence and beyond, are recognised, preserved and celebrated. May the celebrations of our Independence in this 55th year, guide us into deep reflection on what we are today bestowing upon future generations. It is my fervent hope that this reflection reaffirms our commitment to a truly inclusive, embracing 'Trinbago' society, as we continue to make positive strides within ourselves and on the international stage.

On behalf of my wife Reema, children Christian and Anura and on my own behalf I wish the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago a Happy Independence and may Almighty God bless us all.