

President's Inaugural Speech



**Address by His Excellency Professor George Maxwell Richards TC, CMT, Ph.D,
President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Occasion of the
Inauguration of the President on Monday 17th March 2008, at the Hasely Crawford
Stadium at 10.00 o'clock in the Morning.**

The Honourable Patrick Manning, Prime Minister and Mrs. Manning

His Excellency The Most Honourable Professor Sir Kenneth O. Hall, Governor General
of Jamaica and Lady Hall

The Honourable The Chief Justice Mr. Ivor Archie and Mrs. Archie

My Predecessors in Office, Sir Ellis Clarke and the Honourable Arthur N.R. Robinson

Senator the Honourable Danny Montano, President of the Senate and Mrs. Montano

Ms. Penelope Beckles, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives

Cabinet Ministers and Other Ministers of Government

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Representatives of Religious Organizations

Other Members of Parliament

Children of the nation

Representatives of the Media

Other Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

My wife and I are very happy to welcome you all to this ceremony of inauguration of the sixth term of the presidency of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

At the outset, I wish to place on record my appreciation of the decision of the Electoral College to have me return for a second term. I do not take lightly this decision, within its particular context and I take this opportunity to signal to the national community that I will continue to serve diligently. I commit myself to impartiality, independence, even-handedness and objectivity in the fulfillment of my duties.

I am very happy that you have accepted the invitation to witness the inauguration of the President of your Republic in this public place. It is a departure from tradition that has given rise to comments for and against and this is to be heartily applauded. It tells me that our democracy is alive and well.

Let me say this: the decision to open this event to the general public was not taken lightly. I am firmly of the view that the nation, as a whole, must be more aware of the ceremonials (and their meaning) that are part of the official activities of our country. They are not, as some might suppose, useless pomp. Instead they are a necessary part of the tradition of institutions that we have built over the years. These occasions call to mind the fact of our status as a nation and our condition.

States are regarded as successful on the basis of economics but that is not enough. The world calls a failed state one in which there is war, where there is famine and where there is social disaster. We do not fit that profile. However, there is evidence, when we consider crime, education, youth alienation inter alia, to lead us to recognize that the underpinnings of strong statehood are not as sound as they should be and that the concerns lie not with the old and the generations that have had their opportunity to speak and to do but with the generations that are yet to have such opportunity. It is for this reason that this Inauguration focuses on the generations that have to solve the problems that have been created.

The core problem is the failure at social cohesion in a country which, however small it might be, has had the opportunity to create an environment in which the widest variety of cultures have been able to speak to one another, to acknowledge their independence and their uniqueness and to live together, in peace, in spite of their differences.

In this global world in which every problem, every disturbance, every evidence of social breakdown turns upon differences and the ability to speak in peace despite differences, it is my view that Trinidad and Tobago has the most significant lesson to teach. For this reason we are focusing upon the youth of the nation. The late Eric Williams, in many aspects regarded as the father of the nation, whatever else history might record, recognized that the children of this nation carried the future of this country in their schoolbags and it is my duty - moral, political, social and patriotic - to reach out to the generation that carries school bags and to say to them that I agree that the future of this country should be contained within those school bags. Indeed, those school bags must contain the institutional bases of statehood and without these we can only become failed states.

The international pundits make very clear distinctions between what is a failed state and what is a successful state. In our situation, hydrocarbon money is supposed to be enough to save us from starvation and consequent social malaise. But that is not so. Economic deprivation is a powerful provocation to the failure of states. But in my capacity as Head of State I want to tell you that unless the institutions of the people are sound, coherent and, if you will, reading from the same page, we are not going to succeed.

The evidence of failure is emblazoned in the media every day. We read of violence; we read of institutional failure; we read of social dislocation; we read of educational malaise in which children who are not stupid become failures and consequently increase our population of those who are considered anti-social. This country is capable of showing the whole world, in its largest global sense, that it is possible to live in harmony with its environment, with its social differences and to live together with environmental integrity and social peace and that is why the charge which I lay upon this country of Trinidad and Tobago today, focuses upon the youth who have not inherited the best possible legacy but who are enjoined by the country's possibilities to step up to the plate and make it better in every sense of the word.

One of these days, they are going to recognize that indeed a failed state is one that is in war and that suffers famine but that a state that has not been divided by war and famine and which fails to achieve its full potential is also a failed state. I charge this country to live up to its potential.

The undeniable basis for the existence of statehood is the recognition of its life-ways which we call culture. Out of that culture evolves institutions which represent the people's aspirations and it is those institutions which inform the state what must be done to bring life and reality to those institutions. When the institutions fail to make its requirements clear then the state has no job and in this regard Trinidad and Tobago should take heed lest it become perilously close to being a failed state. My charge to the young people gathered here today is to prevent that from happening.

Let Trinidad and Tobago be a state that prevails not a state that fails. Let Trinidad and Tobago be a state which indicates to the wider global society that it is possible to live without loss of identity, together and in peace and let us lift up Trinidad and Tobago in such a way that our claims to social, cultural, institutional and political stability are writ large upon the global stage.

It was the great contemporary thinker Schumacher who said that small is beautiful and my pledge today is to do all that I can to make small beautiful whether we speak of institutions, politics, culture, or statehood. But most importantly, I lay this charge upon you young people gathered here today to make sure that what I promise is delivered.

In closing I want to thank every single person who worked so diligently and selflessly going beyond the call of duty to make this event possible, they are too numerous to be mentioned individually. I am told that, for many of them, young people, it is the first time that they have been engaged in such an undertaking. Above all I thank Almighty God that

he has brought us thus far and I know that he will take us further as we show ourselves willing to walk the distance.

Thank you all for the courtesy of your attention.