

**Message from His Excellency Professor George Maxwell Richards TC, CMT, Ph. D,  
President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Occasion of Independence Day,  
31<sup>st</sup> August, 2008**

Fellow Citizens

We are celebrating the Forty-sixth Anniversary of our independent status as a nation and, like every other Independence Day, it is a time for reflection. As we reflect, we must soberly congratulate ourselves on those things that we have done well - as individuals, in our clubs and other social organizations and throughout the nation.

In spite of the setbacks that are taking centre stage and which can cause us to think otherwise, there are a number of things that can be celebrated. To a considerable extent, we are being shown by the young people of our nation that we continue to be capable of excellent performance.

There are, in our midst, many unsung heroes, one of whom immediately comes to mind. It is the young child, less than ten years old who, by her bravery displayed in the forests of Moruga, prevented the kidnapping of an older cousin. Many of us are not as conscious of the message contained in that act of one little child. I feel certain that there are others who, on a daily basis, do things, though not as spectacular, that better the condition of others within their spheres of contact, but which are not reported because they are taken for granted.

Then there are those who have excelled in the academic field, as reported in the results of the CAPE examinations, recently released. They can be an inspiration to others coming after them in the high school system to keep focused, do what they have to do by pursuing the path before them, at this stage of their lives and be prepared for the next level of education, formal and otherwise.

But our education system must take account of all the variables, not least the sociology of our diverse and complex communities, if we are to develop our human resource to the maximum of its potential. This is the remit not only of those engaged in the formal education system, but it is central to the tasks of those charged with the development of communities and that is a wide embrace. Our country must develop and display, by plans and people-centred programmes, a deeper understanding of what is required to move us forward, together.

Families and communities are the cradle of our development. But they must have an abiding bedrock that undergirds their activities. That bedrock must move them to nurture succeeding generations in such a way that our people display a quality that speaks of confidence, respect for one another and a sense of nationhood that the whole world can recognize in us.

This is a task that must be undertaken from the tender years of our children. It requires well defined policies that take into account the welfare of us all, which we understand, at all levels and in the implementation of which we can be dignified partners.

The Olympic Games, held recently in Beijing, hold deep lessons for us. There, the Caribbean was lifted up and there we saw images of nationhood which we should not easily forget. I am happy that Trinidad and Tobago was a part of that, especially at this time. Let us not celebrate our success, for just a moment, only to forget it as the lights go out on that event. Let us seek to understand the stories surrounding that success. We witnessed individual and collective glory, the fruit of hard work, of discipline, family, community, and national support and not least, teamwork. Once again, we have been provided with a platform for further progress.

As I extend congratulations and best wishes to the national community on the occasion of our Independence celebrations, let us keep in mind the words of Richard Thompson, one of our outstanding young achievers at Beijing:

“We had faith in God, belief in ourselves and we were able to pull it together”.

Happy Anniversary! May God bless our nation.

George Maxwell Richards