

# Independence Day Message 2013

By Prime Minister

**The Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, SC**

31 August 2013

My Dear Citizens,

Just over three years ago, you took the bold step to elect me as this country's sixth Prime Minister and I remain very humbled by your support to become the first woman elected as Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago.

When I took up the mantle to serve the people, there was great expectation that so many of our nation's ills would be swept away almost immediately.

Three years later, the expectations remain and despite all that your government has done, there is a sense among all that there is still so much more to do.

I recognize that the juncture of midterm in office is never easy for any government as we are caught between what we have been putting in place to effect lasting meaningful changes and the time for the results of those efforts to be seen.

Midterm administrations around the world are so challenged and we are no different.

We need look only to our huge northern neighbor in the United States to witness the midterm frustration and the end of term renewal of the American people in the current administration.

There can be no denying that this isn't May 2010.

There can be no expectation either that it could ever be.

But between now and then it is critical for us to see where we have traversed, what gains, what losses, which ways gone wrong, what paths taken right.

And to do this, we must Go Back To Start, the point at which it all began, this movement of change that you started.

This has always been Your Movement, Your Change, Your Revolution which all began on the cusp of our nation's 50th anniversary just over three and half years ago.

Today as I reflect on the birth of our independent nation 51 years ago, it must be an occasion for pause and serious reflection on our achievements to date and our commitment to our future goals and aspirations.

We have so much to be proud of.

May we use the rekindling of these memories as a proud reminder on this nation's ability to rise above any of the challenges such as those we currently face.

## **THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION**

I am keenly aware that many of you are awaiting further evidence of the faith you reposed in us just over three years ago.

There is a strong need to account for our stewardship and that process which has been taking place in some form over time, will now be expanded in specific, measurable ways.

I take this opportunity on our nation's 51st Anniversary to introduce The National Conversation that will include a Forum for the populace at large through which views can be exchanged; it will include a website, even a hotline that allows callers to register their opinions.

I will invite the heads of religious organisations, NGOs, youths, Opposition groups and other stakeholder groups to join in the National Conversation.

Even as our nation commemorates its 51st Anniversary I have the privilege, bestowed by you, to lead the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago into a new era filled with progress and sustainable development.

As I have consistently advocated in the past, the responsibility of leadership is having the demonstrated capacity to listen.

And so this National Conversation will occur between me and all stakeholders.

I will listen to every community leader, each business group and labour representative, but I will humbly ask also that my own message and vision be heard so that together we can arrive at the best solutions and find common purpose for the greater good of all.

Of all that might be said about me from the toughest critic, I assure you, my heart is and has always been, in the right place.

And it is through that center, your words and the voice of God will guide me.

There is an old Japanese proverb that says:

“If the heart is right, the deed will be right”

We will not falter, nor lose sight of what we started out to create together.

We will rise to the occasion.

The job of leading this nation as Prime Minister requires that I also follow your views, your ideas, your sense of what needs to be done.

Our National Conversation begins this process now.

Together, we are the nation's best and only hope for a future that realises our noblest aspirations.

Together, we are the best and only possibility for an accommodation with all interest groups that sincerely work for the benefit of everyone.

We have witnessed sweeping changes in the governance of this country, specifically through our commitment to govern by consultation.

It is for us to listen and respond appropriately.

And that is precisely what I will continue to do.

I will ensure every opinion is garnered, each voice heard, and that the government you elected acts in accordance with the will of the people.

When we speak to each other across the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago a better understanding will emerge among all groups.

Rest assured that I am mindful of many of the sentiments expressed already, but I am equally aware that your government's plans and vision are not adequately reaching you.

That too must change.

You must know that there has never been any significant, historic change that has not had to face similar challenges, obstacles and resistance.

But we stand strong and stay true to your dream and intention for a better standard of living for yourself and for your children.

I can assure you that the political will to address all concerns is there.

There are no sacred cows in your government, every single member of your government is equally responsible for the delivery of services and provision of good governance.

I feel re-energised by the challenges.

There is nothing that inspires me more than when I am among you all.

It is where I get my inspiration and energy.

So the process of the National Conversation brings me back to you.

The sidewalks, the market, the business places, the fishing villages, these will become my meeting places once again.

As Prime Minister over the past three years the demands of office did not always permit me to spend as much time among you, but my desire to connect with you is there.

In the past, it is from you that I got my best understanding of what needs to be done.

It is from you that I will once again gain the best insights.

And I will conduct this exercise without fear or favour.

It cannot and will never matter to me what side of the political field you belong to.

As we commemorate our 51st independence anniversary we must demonstrate that divisiveness is a thing of the past and that national interests are beyond petty political aspirations.

My legacy must be that of a woman who cared enough to do everything possible for everyone regardless of the political consequences, for it is my belief that through genuine service, people will ultimately know the good in your heart and judge you accordingly.

As you well know, my entire life has been a struggle to overcome all manner of hurdles.

I see opportunity in every challenge and I perform best when I am tested most.

## **CRIME**

My recent visits to communities reeling from the effects of crime brought me face to face with the challenges and ordeals encountered by so many.

The recent tragic events in these communities grieve me more than I can adequately express.

Naturally, as a mother and grandmother I share your pain, but as Prime Minister, I also shoulder the responsibility of ensuring that we find a lasting solution to the unbridled crime ravaging these vulnerable communities.

Further, I am heartened that the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Keith Rowley, has agreed to meet and discuss ways and means to deal with the crime problem in Trinidad and Tobago.

It is encouraging to see our Parliamentary colleagues joining with us, putting aside partisan politics in the interests of Trinidad and Tobago, as we too had done when we were in Opposition.

No stone will be left unturned, no effort spared and no resource uncommitted toward the objective of reclaiming these neighbourhoods.

And in this effort I will continue to utilize my policy of consultation with affected citizens, our security forces and other stakeholders.

We will confront this challenge together; and we will overcome it together.

Every resource at our disposal will be used to win this war.

And even as I accept that the problems did not occur overnight but were spawned from years of neglect, I am not prepared to accept any excuses for lack of immediate positive results.

I now that you want solutions rather than excuses and explanations.

I guarantee you that I will wage a war unlike any seen before and at the end of the day, all of us, you and me, Trinidad and Tobago, will win.

## **THE ECONOMY**

The global economic recession has had an impact on the way we do business in Trinidad and Tobago.

But I am pleased to say that despite the economic problems facing even first world countries, Trinidad and Tobago has held its own and has been universally acknowledged for these achievements.

Through prudent economic planning and the sagacity of Ministers of Finance, Winston Dookeran followed by Larry Howai, Trinidad and Tobago has withstood much of the effects of the global economic recession.

Trinidad and Tobago remains robust and stable.

## **DEVELOPMENT**

At home, we met the challenges head on maintaining critical social programmes, keeping food prices down through prudent management and policies, intensifying infrastructural work in the most remote rural areas that were hitherto overlooked.

For the first time ever water flowed from taps, bridges connected communities, impassable dirt tracks gave way to newly paved roads.

Of course some wanted everything to happen in their area overnight especially since they had been neglected for so long prior to our taking office.

I understand the frustrations and the need for faster paced development.

We can do a lot more and in the coming year, I have asked my Ministers and Members of Parliament to intensify the delivery to all our citizens.

## **MOVING FORWARD AS A NATION**

As we celebrate our Independence, I am reminded of the words of David Ben-Gurion, Israel's First Prime Minister, when he said:

“Without moral and intellectual independence, there is no anchor for national independence.”

Indeed, authentic and lasting national independence can only be achieved when all citizens do what is right and just.

Then, and only then can true freedom and independence exist in our land today.

Together we must take this country to that place we all want to be. Mahatma Gandhi once said:

“We must be the change we wish to see”.

I am certain that each of us has a vision and a dream for our country – a country where there is no discrimination of any kind; where there is equity and justice; a country where there is enough for every one; a place where human dignity and human life is sacrosanct; a place without violence; a place where there is prosperity for all.

Fellow citizens, we can achieve all of this when we work together.

I have full confidence in the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I have faith that a partnership between all citizens will lead to the growth and expansion of the economy and bring about sustainable development, employment, and security for all.

As we celebrate this 51st Anniversary of Independence, I appeal to all citizens to come together and work towards the goals of peace and prosperity.

Citizenship is more than a legal designation.

It is also a cultural ideal infused with a moral obligation.

This is our shared responsibility.

Today, more than ever, we know what it means to be an independent nation and a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago.

For fifty one years we have charted our course as an independent nation, proudly flying the Red White and Black.

Let us be steadfast to our democracy, to the rule of law, and the belief that all men and women are created equal and are endowed with inalienable rights.

Let us together stand side by side, united in our diversity, and demonstrate the commitment and the courage necessary to protect and safeguard our democracy.

Let us seize this opportunity to make Trinidad and Tobago a much better place by always doing the right thing, by actively nurturing our pluralism, by celebrating our multiculturalism, and building the harmony which we enjoy.

Our families, our children, and our communities deserve no less.

On behalf of the government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I extend sincere wishes for peace, love, and prosperity to all citizens of this blessed nation.

May Almighty God, shed His light on us and guide and protect our path, as we strive to fulfill our nation's goals and aspirations.

Happy Anniversary!