

**MESSAGE TO THE NATION ON THE 54TH ANNIVERSARY OF
INDEPENDENCE FROM OPPOSITION LEADER
HON KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR**

31 August 2016

Today, on the 54th anniversary of our independence from Great Britain I want to wish everyone the very best for Independence Day.

Today is a day when we celebrate the triumph of our ancestors and offer thanks so that our nation would continue to enjoy the democracy and freedoms that our leaders have preserved.

It is a day to reflect on the journey thus far and remember patriots like Dr. Eric Williams and Dr. Rudranath Capildeo who put partisan politics aside in favour of accepting the sovereignty for which both of them campaigned on behalf of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

By their simple act of nationalism, they ended colonialism and set us on a path of becoming a nation dedicated to its pledge of a love of liberty where every creed and race would find an equal place.

Moreover, when we pulled down the Union Jack to replace it with our own national flag, all our leaders of the day – secular and religious – stood together to proclaim a new nation, rooted in freedom and democracy that would take its equal place in the global family.

Our independence must not be taken lightly. The journey to where we are today did not begin at Marlborough House. It started with the indigenous survivors of colonial genocide, and continued with the African survivors of Trans-Atlantic slavery, and the Chinese, Indian and others who survived indentureship. All of them across our history remain the heroes who helped build what we have today.

History does record those nameless patriots whose labour and sacrifice prepared the foundation for our independence.

That is why when we celebrate our independence, we remember that we as a nation exist not because of our history, but in spite of our history.

Independence is a promise and an aspiration. It is a promise that out of the ashes of colonial degradation, we would rise as nation charged with the responsibility to look after one another in sisterhood and brotherhood, and the fatherhood of God.

Independence is a promise that the wealth and beauty of our islands and the oceans that embrace our land would be cared for so that our grandchildren would live better lives than those who came from foreign lands generations ago to plant the seed to build the nation we have today.

Independence is an aspiration, encoded in our creed: “Together We Aspire; Together we Achieve”.

As an aspiration, it is clear that we have only just begun our journey towards building of a safe, sustainable, equitable, and just society.

Therefore, my fellow citizens, let us see independence as a gauntlet toss, from our ancestors all the way to our children. Our ancestors took us as far as they could; today the task is left to us to remember the promise of independence and work tirelessly towards that noble end.

We must be vigilant and never let partisanship and a quest for control of the state become more important than the welfare of citizens, especially those who are less fortunate.

We must protect our sisters and brothers and those less privileged so that each of us would always remain free to enjoy the bounties of our state in a just and democratic society.

Our task must be to keep Trinidad and Tobago as a unified nation. And in doing so we must constantly remind ourselves of the need for a continuous state of rethinking and reshaping our state to face the ever-changing challenges of the 21st century and beyond.

We must challenge ourselves, and our leaders, to achieve bigger hopes and dreams.

Happy Independence to all and may God bless our nation!