

**MESSAGE TO THE NATION ON THE 55<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF  
INDEPENDENCE FROM OPPOSITION LEADER  
HON KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR**

**31 August 2017**

Today, our nation marks the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence from Great Britain, and on behalf of the Opposition, I extend greetings and best wishes to all citizens.

We have achieved much as a young nation in building our democracy. We can be proud that so many of our citizens have made, and continue to make significant contributions to the arts, in sport, as well as science and technology, both at home and abroad. Our self-determination has brought success, recognition and respect to our twin-island Republic.

However, as we celebrate our achievements in 55 years of charting our own course, I am saddened by the number of challenges we continue to face.

**A Nation in Crisis**

Our journey has been a challenging one; we have faced upturns and severe downturns, and today, unfortunately, we are faced with another sharp decline in our economy. There is a sense of hopelessness in the country, with thousands of citizens struggling to get by, having lost their jobs and only source of income.

I am saddened that our citizens continue to grapple with the scourge of crime and criminality.

Today, citizens of this country seeking health care in our nation's hospitals and health centres are unable to get medication, and in some instances, they cannot get the care they need because of broken or malfunctioning equipment.

The recent cuts in education funding have resulted in hundreds of young people being unable to access tertiary education.

**My vision for Trinidad and Tobago**

In spite of all the negatives that we may be facing now, I believe in the people of Trinidad and Tobago: I believe that we are capable of greatness in every area, and we will soon be firmly back on track for further development.

My vision has always been one of a better quality and standard of living for every person. I have always aimed at ensuring that every citizen is given equal opportunity, and I have

maintained a steadfast, unwavering commitment to the development of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

My team and I remain focused on these goals, and we are developing policy proposals to build our economy, create sustainable jobs and to continue to develop our nation's human capital.

We want to realize a knowledge-driven diversified and growing economy; one that is no longer dependent only on oil and gas, but is also strong in the areas of tourism, agriculture, maritime, and information and communication technology.

Trinidad and Tobago can boast of a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society; and in our diversity we find strength. We must continue to build our sense of patriotism and nationhood. Let us work together to build a society that upholds human rights – a society of acceptance, tolerance and equality.

As we mark this important occasion, it is important to remember that there is hope. Once we have faith and we demonstrate the same conviction, the same patriotism and the same progressive spirit that our forefathers showed fifty-five years ago, we will be on our way to greatness.

Strong leadership is required to confront the challenges we face. It is up to each of us to continue to work towards advancing our national development, and building a prosperous future for all Trinidadians and Tobagonians.

We must be determined and unwavering in our efforts to take our country forward, and take whatever steps are necessary to secure the best possible future for Trinidad and Tobago, and I believe that together, we can live up to our nation's motto: "Together we aspire, together we achieve."

Happy Independence to all and may God bless our nation!