

**MESSAGE TO THE NATION ON THE 56TH ANNIVERSARY OF
INDEPENDENCE FROM OPPOSITION LEADER
HON KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR**

31 August 2018

I join with the national community in commemorating the 56th Anniversary of the Independence of Trinidad and Tobago. Fifty-six years of charting our own course as a nation, on a road that has been fraught with challenges, but with a people determined to move our country along the path of development.

On this occasion, it is important to not only celebrate our achievements but to undertake a sober, piercing assessment of our progress and the difficulties that still lie ahead.

The question must be asked: Have we achieved the Trinidad and Tobago which the leaders of our fight for independence envisioned more than half a century ago? In answering this question, we must decide whether we wish to maintain the status quo, or determine the future that we want for our children and grandchildren.

We have much to be proud of, but what is clear is that there is much work to do if we are to transform Trinidad and Tobago into a prosperous, strong and united country.

There is no question that our country today faces significant issues, and there appear to be no moves by the current administration to deal frontally with the problems affecting people, including escalating crime, inadequate health care, reduced opportunities for education of our young people, job losses, high cost of living, and a declining economy.

Just this week, mere days before our 56th Independence Anniversary, the country learned that one of the mainstays of our economy, Petrotrin, will be closing its refinery and embarking on a restructuring exercise, which will affect more than 2,600 employees.

What is troubling about this is that the Government has chosen to remain silent, and once again, failed to articulate a plan to address the issue of the State-owned company's debt, and the long-term impact of the restructuring exercise on Trinidad and Tobago's economy.

The current administration has repeatedly shown that it does not have the competence to effectively govern our nation, nor does it have the leadership and vision required to effect the transformation of our country.

These developments, along with the Government's failure to account to the people of this country or present viable proposals to return our economy to a growth path, are distressing to the population, which is already grappling with uncertainty for their future.

As we reflect on our nationhood over the last 56 years, it may be difficult to view our accomplishments and progress given our current circumstances, but I am a firm believer in the spirit, determination and resolve of the people of our country.

On this Independence Day, I recommit to the principles of the party which I lead, the United National Congress, to work always towards improving the lives of all our citizens.

The UNC remains focused and we have a clear plan for the development of our country in all areas: ensuring the safety and security of our citizens, providing quality education for our children, improving the standard of healthcare provided to citizens, and focusing on expanding the economy and creating sustainable jobs.

Our vision is of a transformed Trinidad and Tobago, in which our children and all citizens can benefit from the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the global movement towards the increased use of technology in all aspects of society, including the delivery of services to people.

We believe in empowering citizens through education and skills development, promoting economic independence.

I am confident that our people have the willpower, a capacity for innovation and excellence, and are committed to a brighter future for our country.

Let us pledge, then, to work together, to stand united to ensure that our country rises to meet the challenges we face and not only thrive, but prosper. With sacrifice, diligence, resolve and a shared vision, we can make the transformation of our nation possible.

On behalf of the United National Congress, I extend Happy Independence Day greetings to you all, and may God bless our nation.

Kamla Persad-Bissessar, SC, MP