

**MESSAGE TO THE NATION BY DR THE HON. KEITH ROWLEY, MP
PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD & TOBAGO ON
THE OCCASION OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO'S 56TH ANNIVERSARY
OF INDEPENDENCE**

31 August 2018

Fellow citizens of Trinidad and Tobago,

The anniversary of our independence provides us with another opportunity to reflect on the meaning of citizenship and the value of our national identity.

The world has brought us news of nations gripped by civil war, anarchy and terror. In many countries people do not enjoy the freedoms we may be tempted to take for granted.

That our democracy has remained intact these 56 years is no small feat. This deserves celebration given our status as one of the most multi-cultural societies in the western world. We have largely used our diversity as a bridge to make connections with each other. We've enjoyed a deep harmony that is intrinsic to our identity as nationals of this beloved country.

We must guard our unity zealously. This defence is especially needed in turbulent times. It is in times of difficulty that the urge to retreat to narrow interests and partisan lines can become the strongest. But we must resist this and seek instead an agreeable guidepost.

But how do we find common ground in an often polarizing environment?

Permit me to suggest the advice from our first Prime Minister Dr Eric Williams in his inaugural speech on Independence Day 1962:

“Whatever the challenge that faces you, from whatever quarter, place always first that national interest and the national cause.”

On an individual level this asks us to always consider our choices and actions in light of the impact it will have on our families, communities and the entire nation.

For those of us who serve you as leaders, this requires us to work together to ensure that your interests are protected and that the collective good is sought over individual gain.

I have no doubt that we will do what is needed to create sustainable growth and national development. It is our responsibility as loyal citizens to ensure that our children can be proud of the decisions that we must make today.

On behalf of my family and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, I wish you all a safe and happy Independence Day 2018. May God continue to bless you and may God bless our nation.