



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

*Annual
Dinner & Awards
Ceremony*

**COUVA/PT. LISAS CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE**

.....
FEATURE ADDRESS

**SENATOR THE HONOURABLE PAULA GOPEE-SCOON
MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY**

On behalf of

**THE HONOURABLE CAMILLE ROBINSON-REGIS M.P.
MINISTER OF PLANNING AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

.....
2 DECEMBER 2015

**COUVA/PT. LISAS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE CONFERENCE HALL
CAMDEN ROAD, COUVA**

Good evening!

It is said that there are three occasions when people clap during the course of a presentation: at the start, in the hope that the presenter would not bore them to death; sometime during the presentation to let her know they are still awake; and at the end to thank her for finishing so they could finally get a chance to do what they really came to do – to meet and greet, to network and socialize. I pray that you do not have to exercise such patience with me, and that at the end, we would have both been blessed, simply because we came together.

It is my pleasure to be present at this evening's Annual Christmas Dinner and Awards Ceremony to deliver the Feature Address on behalf of the Honourable Camille Robinson-Regis, Minister of Planning and the Environment. The very act of demonstrating your appreciation for the work of your four honourees this evening is worthy of commendation, and on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, please accept our sincerest congratulations.

The season of Christmas is a special one for the Christian community, and in this our cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic, multi-religious country, it is a special time for everyone, regardless of religious persuasion.

Events such as the one we celebrate today, placed as it is within the season, provide us with an opportunity for reflection on our own journey and purpose. The birth of the Christ-child was made possible because of a happy coincidence of a number of factors involving a number of different people who agreed to work with each other.

Mary, the mother of Jesus had to say "yes" to the angel Gabriel who came to announce God's redemption plan. Her husband Joseph had to agree to go along with God's plan. The inn-keeper who, though enjoying bumper success with his full hotel, still found a way to accommodate Mary and Joseph in the manger. Even the animals in the manger had to agree to share their space with these intruders.

I use this analogy, not to make light of one of the most significant events on the Christian calendar, but to drive home the point that what we celebrate here this evening, with the coming together of the Chamber, the Government and the people of the Couva/Pt. Lisas signifies, is the tremendous potential for continued success, and for increased growth and development in one of the most productive areas of the country.

Those whom you honour this evening have worked very hard in their respective fields: Mr. Ramdeo Rampat Maraj in culture, Mr. Roopnarine Sahatoo in business, Mr. Jan Michael Williams (National Goal Keeper) in sport and our lone female Ms. Lucille McKnight in community.

With absolutely no disrespect meant to any of the other awardees, I want to speak of Mr. Jan Michael-Williams for his work between the uprights for the Trinidad and Tobago National Football team, our Soca Warriors. The team's recent successes have certainly restored the faith of many in local football, and lifted our aspirations yet again that Russia 2018 might not seem so distant a dream after all. Just alike Germany 2006, I am certain that it can happen, if all the stakeholders work together to realise the dream.

And it is precisely that characteristic, ladies and gentlemen, that willingness and capacity to join forces for the common good, which will lift Trinidad and Tobago out of our present economic circumstances. I want to suggest this evening that it is in the coming together of business, government and the people that the country's continued growth and development rests. It is this collaboration that the government is actively trying to foster through the resuscitation of the tripartite mechanism that will transform Government from being a prime mover in the economy to a more facilitative role encouraging greater use of the private/public sector partnerships.

Undoubtedly, government, business and labour bring different and sometimes competing ideas, problem-solving skills and approaches to the table, shaped by the different objectives and necessary constraints with which each is accustomed to working. There is no gainsaying though, that all can benefit from the perspectives and talents of each other in pursuit of a common cause.

There is a constant tension between accountability and flexibility, and as we have seen over the course of the last administration, flexibility with the rules of engagement often lead to wonton wastage and monumental mismanagement. This Government takes very seriously its responsibility to be accountable to the citizens, and therefore a high-accountability ethos is baked into everything we do.

Our Honourable Prime Minister has repeatedly made the point, that while the proverbial buck stops with him, every Minister and Member of Parliament, will be held accountable for the portfolio under their charge.

On the other hand, business needs to be creative and flexible to be able to envision and execute better business solutions. The government's challenge in the public/private partnership will therefore be to manage the outcomes but not the process; while the business partner's challenge will, of necessity, be to ensure that it preserves the ability to exercise discretion.

Labour's role, I dare say, would be to help business and government balance their interests whilst ensuring that the human capital necessary for the venture is treated with dignity and respect.

The global financial crisis has taught us that, ultimately, the fortunes of the public and private sectors are mutually dependent, and therefore the success or value of the private/public partnerships which we are seeking to develop, will depend on whether each sector has the capability, capacity, and institutional structures to support and sustain the venture, the participants, and the process.

It is the desire of our government that there be an increase in the number of private/public partnerships. Indeed, the Government, in announcing its decision to revert to a previous threshold for accessing publicly-funded housing, sought to make the point that more could be achieved for the middle class in terms of housing accommodation, if there was greater participation from the private sector.

In this regard, the Government will underscore its role as facilitator in this process, while remaining a prime mover for the provision of housing accommodation for the less economically well-off.

For this to become a reality though, the government intends to pay careful attention to ensuring that innovation continues to be encouraged and the challenges and opportunities that these partnerships present are fully understood, managed and accounted for.

For us in Government, that means broadening our oversight and control to ensure that the public's interest is effectively represented, supervised and ultimately, satisfied.

The Couva/Pt. Lisas area is a pivotal part of the recalibration of the national economy. The Point Lisas Industrial Estate is the heart of Trinidad and Tobago's petrochemical sector. The Estate is a world-class facility, covering 860 hectares and represents an investment of over US \$2 billion.

Today, the Estate is home to approximately 103 companies involved in a range of activities. But it was also in this area that the sugar cane industry was nurtured, providing employment and development opportunities for thousands of families. The same lands that provided for revenue for Trinidad and Tobago in its early stages of development, today provides a home for another sector that contributes significantly to our current developmental needs.

That only happened because there was someone with a grand plan for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That only happened because the participants in the process agreed to work with each other and for a greater common cause. That only happened when we forgot about self and thought about country.

As we enter more fully into the Christmas season, I want to challenge the Couva/Pt.Lisas Chamber of Commerce to not only continue recognizing the sterling contributions of the people of this catchment area, but also, to re-examine its role in the private/public partnerships envisaged by this Government. I urge all to join with us as we seek to significantly enhance the quality of life of citizens of our country, not just for today, but for the unforeseeable future.

On behalf of all of us in Government, and on my own behalf, I wish all of you a merry Christmas and bright, prosperous and hope-filled 2016.
I thank you.