



Address by

The Honourable Maxie Cuffie, MP

Minister of Public Administration & Communications

Orientation Programme for Deputy Permanent Secretaries

Grand Riviere Conference Room

Courtyard by Marriott,

Port of Spain

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SALUTATIONS

- Ms. Joan Mendez, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Administration & Communications
- Dr. Roland Baptiste, former Chief Personnel Officer and lead facilitator for today's sessions
- Deputy Permanent Secretaries
- Other Senior Public Servants
- Members of the media
- Distinguished ladies and gentlemen

Allow me, on behalf of the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications to welcome all of you into the fold of the upper echelons of the Public Service. I am certain that when you entered the public service many years ago, you might not have dreamt that one day, you would occupy the offices you now do. Indeed, over the years you probably had some choice words for "the PS and dem." As fate would have it, you are now part of the "and dem" crew, with no one else to blame.

The future of the public service and its impact on government's ability to deliver goods and services in a timely, consistently reliable, and easily accessible manner, rests squarely now on your shoulders. I know that you have emerged from a very vigorous selection process, so allow me as well the indulgence of congratulating all of you on this significant milestone in your career. In fact I think you deserve to give yourself and your colleagues a round of applause.

This phase of your career journey has all the potential to be both exciting and challenging, a minefield of disappointments and path of accomplishments. Whatever the outcome, you will have a critical part to play in its determination.

You are entering the leadership of the Public Service as the latest cohort, at a time of compelling change when the Public Service is finally beginning to see the kind of change that the public has long been demanding.

Let me give an example. One of the perennial complaints from the public and public servants is about the length of time it takes to fill positions by the Public Service Commission. You are entering at a time when as of January this year, beginning with five and now up to eight, Ministries have been given the power by the Public Service Commission to initiate the recruitment process for peculiar positions in accordance with Regulation 13 (5) of the Public Service Commission regulations.

That means if you happen to be placed in the Ministries of:

Energy and Energy Industries,

Public Administration and Communications,

Rural Development and Local Government,

Office of the Prime Minister,

Community Development, Culture and the Arts,

Finance

Works and Transport

And Labour and Small Enterprise Development

you can no longer blame the Public Service Commission for your Ministry's failure to recruit persons to fill the listed peculiar positions that are critical to your Ministry.

With that new power, which Ministries were not able to exercise before January of this year, comes the responsibility to ensure the maintenance of the impartiality and independence for which the Public Service Commission has been known and to always be aware that it is the Commission which will ultimately make the final appointment.

You are entering the leadership of the Public Service at a time when the environments in which public servants are required to work are perhaps the most pleasant in its history. The Government Plaza joins the Waterfront Complex and the Ministry of Education Towers among the new additions to the pleasant work environments, now enjoyed by Public Servants.

You are entering the leadership of the Public Service at a time when significant upgrades in the deployment of information technology are about to be made with the move from GovNeTT 2 to GovNeTT NG. The NG stands for Next Generation.

Along with the technology, you are the next generation of permanent secretaries and public service leaders. The future of the country's next generation also depends on you.

You are entering the leadership of the Public Service at a time of great financial and societal challenges. Never before have we been called upon to do so much with so little. As the financial demands being made on the government continues to expand, its ability to meet them continues to contract.

The last time the Public Service embarked on a similar exercise for 'Enhancing Career and Succession Management in the Public Service' as the PSIP project was called, it cost 730,000 dollars and was held at the Hyatt Regency over eight days, using external consultants. Today we are using mainly internal resources and we are at the Marriott but I have every confidence that the training you will get today will leave you better prepared for the challenges you will face than any of your predecessors. This time you were very much involved in preparing the needs assessment of the programme so that the critical areas and competencies were to a large extent determined by you and your development needs.

The purpose of this training is to equip you to adequately respond to these challenges, mindful of the parameters within which you are called upon to work. As the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration noted in its first and second reports, strengthening good governance is about capacity building through institutions and people. I have every confidence that you can more than measure up to the task that lies ahead.

In the same way you have worked diligently throughout your career in the public service to arrive at this point today, so too, others must feel sufficiently strengthened by your promotions, to aspire to make the public service a lifelong career. The names and praises of Frank Barsoti, Frank Rampersad, Reginald Dumas, Doderidge Alleyne, and even our facilitator, Dr. Roland Baptiste, would have inspired many of you to embark on a career in the Public Service. You should aspire to having your name added to that list a generation from now.

There is one more task which I am placing on your shoulders and which will require the lessons you learn in this orientation, particularly today's module on

Leadership, and that is, to work hand in hand with your various Ministers to deliver on the strategic imperatives contained in the Government's Strategic Development Plan, known as Vision 2030.

Implementation of Vision 2030 is almost exclusively in the hands of Government Ministries, and by extension, its Accounting Officers. In other words, you will be the determining factor in whether the country achieves the very laudable goals delineated in Vision 2030. It will require a level of out of the box thinking, a level of innovation and creativity, a level of accountability and transparency, characteristics that you have already demonstrated to have earned your place in today's Orientation.

There is an advertisement that runs on one of the nation's radio stations, which quotes American President Abraham Lincoln. It says: "nearly all men can stand the test of adversity, but if you really want to test a man's character, give him power." Your appointment at this time means that you will be tested by both adversity and power. I hope that you are all men, and women, equal to that task.

There are three pieces of advice I will leave with you today, advice that has served me well over the years and which, if you choose to accept it, will certainly serve you in good stead.

The first is to embrace this position with passion and with purpose. You cannot sell what you don't have, that's fraud. If you don't have the passion and can't work with purpose, you will be unable to inspire and motivate those placed in your care.

Secondly, gain wisdom from mentors. There are many retired Permanent and Deputy Permanent Secretaries. Go and sit at their feet and learn from them, so

that you avoid the mistakes they made and build on the successes they achieved.

Finally, be engaged in a community of practice. As you all sit together here today, look out for each other, swap your stories of what works and what doesn't. Support each other on the journey, because the higher you go, unfortunately, it's the lonelier it becomes.

As you enter into this first module of Leadership and Protocol, I am confident that we have chosen the best from whom you can learn. Dr. Baptiste and Mrs Lenore Dorset are among the best Trinidad and Tobago has to offer in their chosen fields, and I am confident that, should you allow yourselves, you will benefit greatly from the experience.

Congratulations again on officially entering this new phase of your journey, and I pray that your experience as Deputy Permanent Secretaries will be both rewarding and enjoyable.