



SPEAKING NOTES

THE HONOURABLE CAROLYN SEEPERSAD-BACHAN

MINISTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

MP FOR SAN FERNANDO WEST

AT THE SIGNING CEREMONY FOR AWARDEES OF

SCHOLARSHIPS BY THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT

BOARD ROOM, LEVEL 7 NALIS BUILDING

PORT OF SPAIN

FRIDAY 24TH AUGUST, 2012



Ministry of
Public Administration

Speaking Notes for Minister:

Thank you PS Macintyre.

- Your Excellency Senor Humberto Rivero Rosario, Cuban Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago
- Senora Ana Silvia Rodriguez, Minister Counsellor of the Cuban Embassy
- Ms. Gillian Macintyre, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Administration,
- Ms Prabha Maraj, Mr. Richard Madray, Deputy Permanent Secretaries, Ministry of Public Administration
- Proud Parents and Guardians

- Our 2012 Recipients of Scholarships from the Government of the Republic of Cuba
 - Ms. Akifah Taylor
 - Ms. Ria des Vignes
 - Mr. Mikhail Yorke
- Members of the Media
- Other Members of Staff of the Ministry

Today's signing ceremony is a symbol of the relationship between Cuba and Trinidad and Tobago, and the start of a journey for these young people who have received scholarships based on their undoubted merit and who are here with us, anxious to begin this extremely eventful journey, not just to

Cuba, but to their dreams of becoming health professionals and helping their communities and countries.

It is not just the physical journey from here to Cuba. It is more than that. It is really a journey to a profession. After they sign a Declaration of Discipline here which ensures that they follow the rules and honour their responsibilities to us and to the Government of Cuba, they will leave for Cuba next Tuesday, August 28th, three days before we celebrate 50 years of Independence.

Some people will say that we have a medical school here so if we're really independent, why are we sending students to Cuba? This is really to miss the point of what Cuba can teach us and do for our people. Cuba is one of the most respected countries

globally in terms of its medical training facilities and its health care. More, Independence is not just about becoming a nation. It is about being a nation among nations, building bridges and developing alliances that are mutually beneficial. In medicine and medical care, there is a lot that we can learn from Cuba.

Let me start by providing some insights and a context into the offer of scholarships by Cuba to these young people here with us and others whose financial means do not match their undoubted talent and potential.

First of all, Cuba is the most advanced of all the developing countries, and certainly, of all the Caribbean countries, in its medical facilities and its emphasis on primary health care or community medicine.

Through Cuba's "Operation Miracle" over one million people from more than 31 countries had their vision restored by Cuban doctors. Cuba's Latin American School of Medicine has the mission of training general medical practitioners and specialises in providing primary health care training. The school has graduated 8,600 medical students from 54 countries, especially from the poorest sectors in their societies, who represent a wide range of ethnicity and educational and cultural backgrounds.

Cuba has shown that it is not the money for medical training that matters so much as the willingness to serve under-privileged communities. This is what we want these young people to do when they return home. We want them to come back to their communities and their country and serve the people.

The major thrust of our scholarship programme is to provide opportunities for our young people who excel in their scholastic fields while, at the same time, we fill the skills gaps in our own national development. Scholarships make it possible for deserving students to achieve their full potential.

Were it not for this Government's scholarship programme there would have been many more young people whose inability to afford higher education would have deprived them of the opportunity to achieve their full potential. This is why I have made it clear that we not only seriously consider all the scholarship offers we get from other governments but we seek to increase the offers we get especially in fields that are essential to our national development.

This special relationship with Cuba, that in a way we reinforce today, started in 1997 and was strengthened in 2001 when a Joint Commission Bilateral Framework agreement was signed between our two Governments. Since then Medicine and Sports have been the major areas of focus of the programme. So far over twenty seven (27) scholarships have been awarded and this year we have four more.

As the Minister responsible for managing the scholarship process and matching the opportunities to our national needs, I thank the Cuban Government for supporting our scholarship programme over the past fifteen years. I am also declaring my intention to make greater use of the scholarships you offer us and to explore new scholarships in fields other than sports and medicine.

This is something I believe we can discuss at some other time. However, on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, let me thank you and your Government for your support and for these scholarships. Let us work together to deepen the friendship and goodwill that characterise the relationship between our countries.

To the parents of the young people here today, I know you will miss your children but they are off to better themselves and hopefully to make your lives and the lives of countless citizens of our country better. It is said for the bird to fly, the egg must break. This is a sad time for you but it should also be a time of joy.

Let me speak to our scholars now. This is an opportunity that you may not otherwise have got. Make full use of it. Squeeze every drop of learning you can out of it. But while doing so, I want you to be conscious of your parents, your community and your country. What you are doing in Cuba is not only for your benefit but for the benefit of your family, your friends and your country. Remember that you are ambassadors of Trinidad and Tobago and that your behaviour, your attitude and your bearing must be consistent with the hopes we have in you and the sacrifice your parents have made to educate you. In closing, I have three words for you, "Make us proud."

I thank you